

Society.

Women & Literature In Africa

FLORENCE ONYEBUCHI ORABUEZE



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Society, Women and Literature in Africa

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Dedication

This work is dedicatd to my wonderful children – Chiamaka Ifeatu, Ibuchukwu Nkeonyeasoya, Obiajulu Ikenna and Chukwunedum Ndukaife – for their love and understanding.

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Foreword

Society, Women and Literature in Africa is F.O. Orabueze's ebullient dance in the erudite plane of Literary Criticism. It is a bold volume which immediately inscribes her as an authentic voice among contemporary African critics. The author captures in a single panoramic sweep the subtle concepts explored in feminist literature. Traversing the ideological, literary, political, cultural and ethical issues which are implicated in feminist writing, she shows how contemporary African writers have tried to counteract man's false assumptions about sex, love, society, fecundity and womanhood.

In a demonstration of versatility, the author explores how African writers have responded to the demands of feminism; how they have analyzed women's experiences that feminist literature should reflect; how the novelists have demonstrated experiences that are intrinsically women or are beyond man's perception.

The essay entitled "Woman's Cross Cultural Burden in the selected works of West African Female writers" explores the recurrent themes of motherhood, polygamy, abandonment and widowhood in the works of Nwapa, Emecheta, Alkali, Aidoo and Mariama Bâ. She explores how these writers have responded to the aesthetic feminist surge in African literature. In a critical incision, she reveals their literary process of characterization,

theme and the equilibrium achieved in articulating feminist aesthetics.

In “Prostitution: A Metaphor for the Degradation of Womanhood in Bode Osanyin’s the *Noble Mistress*”, the author approaches the subject of woman degradation in society from the perspectives of a comprehensive research and an in-depth referencing. She shows inter-textually how degradation of woman correlates other forms of degradation in society.

“Gendered Social Division of Labour in the African Novel” explores the theme of unfairness of institutionalized differentiation in the African novel. It reveals the total emasculation of woman in patriarchy and her desire to be liberated from male-annexation. The female protagonists in the feminist novels rebel against this frightening landscape of social and economic exploitation of woman. The author shows that culture can be made a legitimate instrument of liberation.

In a piece entitled “The Prison World of Nigeria Woman: Female Reticence in Sefi Attah’s *Everything Good Will Come*”, the author explores the dimensions of “gender silences”. She shows how woman’s voice has been stolen in patriarchy, thus rendering her a social and political mutant. This thought-provoking essay also reveals that in patriarchy woman is the most vigorous upholder of customs that negate her. Woman has been socialized to a narrow consciousness of herself. The walls around her will

crumble, if she can challenge the obnoxious practices that negate her.

Another essay entitled “Womanhood as a Metaphor for Sexual Slavery in Nawal El Saddawi’s *Woman at Point Zero*” underscores that in patriarchy a woman is educated to make an object of herself for male pleasure. She is excluded from politics as a result of religion. The essay on “The Ugly Face of Ghana in the New Millennium: Alienation of Children in Amma Darko’s *Faceless*” is a stylistic study of the consequences of globalization in post-independent Ghana. In “The Theme of Dispossession in A.N Akwanya’s *the Pilgrim Foot*”, the author examines the myriad perspectives of dispossession and the dispossessor.

All in all, this compendium expands the critical dimensions on feminist writing in Africa. It reveals feminist aesthetics to be a process of exploring woman as she is. This collection opens a new vista of critical appreciation of feminist writing which has come to recognize the multidimensional nature of women.

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Chapter 1

The Ugly Face of Ghana in the New Millennium: Alienation of Children in Amma Darko's *Faceless*

1.0 Introduction

The twenty-first century has been eulogized as one of globalization. It is seen as the age when man has achieved unparalleled economic success, the movement of goods and services across borderless countries, and unequalled advancement in communication and technology. However, the critics of globalization have their reservations about the success attributed to globalization. For example, Neder Veen Pieterse observes the loopholes and contradictions within the same system of global integration as being “uneven among countries and regions, among regions within countries and among categories within regions” (2004:129). Also in his examination of the process of economic displacement by globalization, Stephen Castles finds out that “individuals and groups who do not fit are excluded, and may be denied the basic rights, such as the right to work and the right to food security” (1998:179).

In this era of globalization, the African literary writers have shifted their attention from the romanticization of the continent, and the confrontational attitude of the white imperialist during the slave trade and colonialism that compels the devaluation of African culture and

religion (Obiechina, 1996:31). In fact, African literature can no longer be seen as lacking validity and universality because it is an “African dealing with human problems in Africa and African experience (Nwodo, 2005:15). A Nigerian linguist believes that:

... issues like gender, the environment politics, health, the drug scourge, etc that forge a new vision of society are deemed much more necessary than a nostalgic rumination in an idealized historic traditional past (Chukwukere, 2006:71).

It is a truism that in Africa, the men were the first to acquire formal Western education. Having been equipped with education, they ventured into rewriting what should be called authentic African literature. Writers like Chinua Achebe, Elechi Amadi and a host of others in their attempt to paint a larger-than-life image of the African man, unwittingly whittled down the image and role of the African woman, and a plethora of protests from feminist writers flow from this mistake. However, a critic offers this placatory opinion:

It is not always that male writers have been biased; they have merely presented the female social situation as it is. This is why for most part a woman occupies a position of inferiority since the writer is

anxious to be faithful to the world he portrays (Taiwo quoted in Nwahuanya, 2003:194).

In the protest writings of African female writers like Flora Nwapa, Buchi Emecheta, Zaynab Alkali, Mariama Bâ and the others, they created female characters, who have major roles and their social and economic independence from their male counterparts are unquestionable. Some of their thematic preoccupations include the issues of motherhood, abandonment of social roles, polygamy, wife-inheritance and barrenness. There is no doubt that in their portrayal of the African man, his virility and masculinity are hurt.

Amma Darko is one of the new female voices on the continent. In her two hundred and thirty-two paged novel, she deals with the problems of child alienation and its consequence in the era of globalization. Darko's novel, *Faceless*, like Ayi Kwei Armah's novel, *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* and *Fragments*, he x-rays the alienation of the individual in the society. But while the individuals that are alienated in Armah's novels are adult males that of Darko's are the most vulnerable: children and women. Besides, while Armah's protagonists: Barko and the Man respectively have a choice to participate in the bazaar of the corrupt-ridden, materialistic Ghana, Darko's female characters do not have such as they are nailed in the decadent and vicious society they are born into.

Amma Darko uses female characters like Fofo, Baby T, Maa Tsuru, Ordarley, Kabria and two families-one belongs to the wretched of Accra and the other to the middle class-to show the pervasiveness of the exploitation, sexual harassment, marginalization of the females in the world of the novel, which cut across ethnicity, age and class. She also uses Poison, the brutal streetlord, to show that alienation and its consequences are not gender-sensitive. Her novel, *Faceless*, with its setting in Accra, Ghana, tells the pathetic story of an intelligent fourteen-year old streetchild, Fofo and her disintegrated and displaced family in the slums of Accra. The story begins with Fofo, who intends to protect her job at Agbogbloshie market sleeping in front of the shop. The street-lord, Poison, attempts to rape her, and she kicks him and flees to her friend's equally shanty in the same market. In the morning, Kabria, another female character from whose point of view the story is told, goes to buy foodstuff for her family and Fofo disguised as a boy attempts to snatch her handbag from her. She is caught and the mob tries to lynch her, but she is saved by her would-be victim, Kabria. In the course of their discussion, Fofo reveals to Kabria that the unclaimed, unidentified and mutilated corpse she sees earlier in the market is the corpse of her elder sister. Kabria who works with a non-governmental agency, MUTE, tells the other three women in the organization her experience in the market. The women get curious and want to get into the root of why children run into, sleep,

eat and defecate in the street. The women go to the police to report about the corpse in the market, and they discover that the police force does not have the wherewithal to do their constitutional job. They then undertake to unravel the identity of the murdered teenager and her murderer. With the help of a journalist, Sylv Po, they discover that Fofu's mother lives in one of the ghettos in Accra and that she has been abandoned by her two lovers, whom she has six children for. They also find out that a gang of adults runs the business of trafficking young girls as prostitutes. They bring to light the identity of the murdered girl and her murderer. As the story ends, they persuade Fofu to go off the street and get rehabilitated.

1.1 The Ugly Face of Ghana in the New Millennium

Ghana's Accra, where the events in the novel take place is one with the face of so much ugliness. The possibility of the alienation of women and children is very high in such a depreciating physical environment without any moral tone. From the very first page of the novel, the narrator tells of Fofu's home which is in front of a shop in Agbogbloshie market, where she sleeps on a cardboard sheet. As she flees Poison's sexual molestation, she seeks refuge in her friend's equally poor ventilated shack in another part of the same market. Ordarley's shanty is described thus:

It was fairly illuminated inside the wooden shack because the door was never shut. It had no windows and they would all have sweated and suffocated to death if the door was ever shut. Paying two hundred cedis a day each to the owner, it was what they could afford (Darko, 2003:28).

Besides, Sodom and Gomorrah where the majority of the street urchins and displaced young people live is not better than the Agbogloboshie market. It is said to be a place where aborted fetuses, low class prostitutes and drug traffickers are found. And it is a place where “filth and sin, suffering and ignorance, helplessness and woes ruled the day” (93). The narrator goes further to describe the damned settlement as a place where drugs flow freely (p.52). But despite the damnation of Sodom and Gomorrah, it is a place where one’s freedom of movement is restricted as the streetlords control some of its territory and activities and exact strict penalty on trespassers.

The part of inner city Accra where Fofo grows up and her mother still lives with her two half-brothers is not much better than Agbogloboshie market and Sodom and Gomorrah. The streets are woven with narrow alleys and dilapidated houses; table top provisions are situated everywhere, the drains are fully choked with filth and discarded plastic bags; there is loud music and strong redolence of a *kpeteshie*, and making out Fofo’s house in the midst of the staggering disorderliness and congestion

proves difficult. The space in Fofu's compound is shared with domestic animals and children living in the compound. From the narrator's description of the children in the compound, it is very evident that there is no difference between them and the ones living in the street. This is deductible from the narrator's opinion:

Fofu could have been the girl in the tattered brown underpants with the diseased red hair and a protruding stomach, carried on legs that were as thin as two dried sticks. Or the other in the flour sack underpant with a body ravaged by rashes and whose nose seemed never to stop running (p. 41).

Apart from the mess that is the market, Sodom and Gomorrah and inner city of Accra, there is the general lack of infrastructures that engulfs the whole city. Public toilets, for example, are either non-existent or they are insufficient and people are forced to either queue on the lines for hours to defecate or they answer the call of nature everywhere under the full glare of people and animals. Also the hospitals and mortuaries are run down. The government authorities whose responsibilities it is to carry out some public duties shirk them. Baby T's corpse stays in the market for several days and people flock to the scene to look at it. The police and Metropolitan Assembly people neither send the corpse to the hospital for autopsy nor to the mortuary nor bury it. Even when

the corpse is to be disposed, the grumbling city council workers who are anxious to get the unpleasant job done quickly put it in *wawa* coffin and pack it with the others like sardines into refuse trucks and bury them in mass graves at Mile Eleven. Those corpses with signs of being murdered are sent to Korle-Bu Mortuary for an autopsy. Baby T's corpse is sent there but the attendant wonders why the MUTE women are interested in her autopsy report as there is general disinterest and apathy about such reports. The police, whose duty it is to investigate murder cases, are ill-equipped, ill-trained or simply lazy.

Amma Darko's indictment of visionless leadership in Ghana is not limited to the country. In fact, in Nana Wilson-Tagoe's critical appraisal of Ike Oguine's novel, *A Squatter's Tale*, there is not much difference between Ghana's leadership in *Faceless* and that of Nigeria in *A Squatter's Tale*. The critic observes the novel encompasses the history of an entire government of Nigeria, "unanchored, rudderless and adrift in a nation that provides no meaningful forms or standards for living their lives" (p.97). Dennis Brutus also surveying the black leadership in South Africa after several decades of the white apartheid policy has only one regret:

I am very pleased that we succeeded in overcoming apartheid. My only regret is that those who have succeeded, who have replaced the apartheid regime, have been guilty of policy similar to the

policy of apartheid regime. They have protected a small elite of millionaires...er... Black millionaires now, living under very secure conditions... Barbed wires, sex lives, armed guards... but the mass of the people is still living in the slums in the ghettos and shanties and shacks (2007:35).

Charles E. Nnolim, in his review of the challenges for African writers and critics in the twenty-first century, also indicts the senselessness, corruption and insensitivity of African leadership. He feels that black leaders all over Africa are not better than the white colonialists whose mantles they inherited. In his opinion, "When the white men threw in the towel, our eyes were opened to the rapacity, greed, myopia and the corrupt tendencies of our indigenous politicians" (2006:2). In the opinion of another African, the problems of Africa and its people are man-made. She says "Africa is not poor; it has been impoverished... Nobody can teach us what we should aspire to become in the twenty-first century, in the third millennium" (Traore quoted in Sutherland-Esi and Diaw, 2005:67).

Amma in the novel shows that the new millennium is still a hopeless one for Ghana, if the trend in environmental decay is not checked. She believes that one of the factors, which is very salient to the environmental problems, is the rural-to-urban migration of unemployed job-seekers. The narrator makes it clear that most of the

children, who live in Sodom and Gomorrah, apart from children like Fofo and Baby T whose mother lives in the slums of Accra, are a “concentration of many of these young girls from the north, but even there, you have a fair share of southerners” (p. 75). In the world of *Faceless*, the influx of migrants in search of greener pastures or fleeing from inter-tribal wars, or environmental degradation is one of the many negative impacts of globalization in the new millennium.

1.2 Alienation of Children in the Novel

It is not an exaggerated statement, therefore, that the deplorable state of Ghana’s Accra as described in the novel must have a negative effect on its dwellers. The ugliness in the environment is reflected in the ugliness of the slum-dwellers. The first thing to see in such crowded slum is that there is fragmentation and flexibility in people’s behaviour. There is no family bonding as different people from diverse backgrounds and ethnicity are hemmed in the ghettos. The positive customary values that bind a group of people together are lacking and those that have existed are jettisoned. For example, Naa Yomo’s narration to the women of MUTE shows that part of the problem of street-girls and prostitutes is that the days of puberty rites are over. In the past, this noble customary practice ensures chastity in girls before they get married. The seriousness with which indiscriminate sexual intercourse is viewed in the past is seen in the

consequences of Maa Tsuru's mother placing a curse on her absconded lover, for putting her in the family way and shirking responsibility. The disgrace to her and her family for getting pregnant before puberty rites is enormous. Nothing short of a curse shall assuage the young woman's soul as she pushes the blighted baby into a very hostile world. Maybe without the curse placed on Maa Tsuru's absent father, and invariably on the girl, the story would have taken a different turn. Invariably, the curse leads to Baby T's death, Maa Tsuru being stranded in life without a husband, and the six children growing up without fathers.

Naa Yomo believes that sadly enough for her society, there is sexual freedom. Kabria complains that girls as young as seven years, who stay on the street, are already sexually active. And for the street-girls, the first act of sexual experience starts with rape. This traumatic experience can be seen in Poison's attempt to rape Fofo at Agbogloboshie market, Nii Kpakpo's attempted defilement of Baby T and Onko's actual defilement of Baby T. The reader may be tempted to wonder why this is so. It should be noted that the erosion of the people's cultural values did not start with globalization, but it just worsened the situation. The trampling down of the people's culture is part and parcel of empire builders. Franz Fanon, reflecting on the introduction of inferiority complex in the black race, says: "Overnight the Negro has been given two frames of reference within which he had to place himself. His metaphysics, or, less pretentiously, his customs and

the sources on which they are based, were wiped out because they were in conflict with a civilization that he did not know and that imposed itself on him" (1967:110). Also reacting to the position of the colonized black people, Susan Frutkin has it that the "French characteristically attempted to assimilate every inhabitant of their colonies, and, to this end, they consciously superimposed French culture, traditions and social values on the native societies, no matter how diverse or far-flung" (1973:3). The source of this racist ideology of the superiority of the white race over all the other races is traceable to slave trade, plantation economy and colonialism. Two of the racist thinkers: David Hume and Edward Long, according to Fryer, "justified the degradation of blacks by insisting that in every mental moral way they were inferior to the whites" (1984:134). To Georg Hegel, Africa is enveloped by the mantle of night and the African is like an animal in savagery and lawless and what are needed to tame him are slavery and enslavement. (1975:174). Apart from the philosophers tinkering with their racist ideologies, the novelists like Polish-born Joseph Conrad describes the setting of his frictional work in a land of "darkness, "formless" and a "jungle" inhabited by "barbarians", "cannibals" and "fools" (1999). However, racism is a smokescreen for the economic exploitation of Africans and the pillaging of her natural resources for the development of the Western capitalist market. In the opinion of Ibrahim Bello-Kano, "racism is not a matter of mistaken or wrong

attitude, or even a moral failing on the part of the racist, but an objective symbolic economy of capitalist modernity and the imperialist culture that it has engendered (2003:212).

Having examined critically the sources of destruction of the people's cultural values, it is time to evaluate the consequences of that destruction: alienation of children, which is the thrust of Amma Darko's *Faceless*, as "there are alternative ways to explore a theme and read a narrative" (Badamus, 2003:172).

Amma Darko shows that in the novel under study, alienation of children cannot be blamed solely on the environment and racist ideologies. The phenomenon will not be possible if there is no parental negligence of their duties to their children. Kwei, Fofu's father, abandons his responsibilities to his children and absconds. The novelist presents him as a jobless, drunken woman-batterer, who is a play-thing in the masterful hands of his mother. His absence doubles the maternal duties of already bowed down and weak Maa Tsuru, who is incapable of taking right decisions on behalf of her family. Naa Yomo, with her wealth of wisdom and experience, blames him principally for the mess his children find themselves in. she confides in the women:

A good man will never say to his child: there is no food, go out onto the street and find some money for food. He would say: there is no food, so we'll all

drink lots of water and go to bed. Tomorrow is another day. You will go to school and I will make sure there's food to eat when you return home (p. 116).

Fofo's mother, Maa Tsuru, is one woman that is presented as being irresponsible and cast in the mold of a tragic character. She symbolizes the burden of the African woman, whom female writers have represented in their different works. Reflecting on the predicament of the African woman as tragedy, Chinyere Nwahunanya says:

Those who look for the Aristotelian fall from grace to grass in the West African female novelists' account of the tragedy of woman may never find it, for she has never occupied a high position in her life. But the reader feels her tragedy because the experiences she is made to go through do arouse in him pity which Aristotle considered integral to tragedy (2003:217-218).

Maa Tsuru's tragic life which arouses pity in the reader is the fact that she is born with a curse placed on her and her lineage by an agonizing, dying mother. Because of the society's belief in the efficacy of that curse on her, her heartthrob, Kwei, cannot formalize any marriage relationship between the two of them, because his mother stoutly rejects that. Her resistance to their marriage may

be seen as “woman-on-woman violence and abuse shown women as a group suffering from self-inflicted wounds” (Nnaemeka, 1997:22). Kwei does not even bestow on his four children the honour of his family’s identity. The children do not only have to bear the burden of grinding poverty as a result of their father’s absence, but they also have to carry the cross of not having a family name. As the narrator says:

Kwei and Maa Tsuru’s first daughter, but third child, who was born during Kwei’s unceremonious absence, was never honoured with Kwei’s family name at birth, she went first by the name of “Tsuru’s Baby”, which evolved to “Baby Tsuru”, and then to Baby T (p. 155).

Throughout the story, the names of the children are Fofo, Baby T and their elder brothers’ names are never mentioned, as they don’t have much identity, which a father could have bestowed on them. But this is not to say that Maa Tsuru is absolved from blame in the alienation of her children. Despite the fact she has been used and dumped by Kwei, she goes on to take another lazy conman, Nii Kpakpo, which relationship drives the two sons and daughters into the street. As if the poverty her family is saddled with is not enough, she goes on to have two children for her latest lover. Her very intelligent daughter, Fofo, is very angry with her for her violation of

the essence of motherhood, which Michel Foucault says is a “biological-moral responsibility lasting through the entire period of the child’s education” (1990:104). It, therefore, beats Fofu’s imagination that her mother will nurse Nii Kpakpo and her children while breaching the society’s natural presupposition that her mother should nurse them free, before and after giving birth to them (Irigaray, 1987:97). Fofu’s anger and contemptuous attitude to her mother is understandable as she sees her as not offering a “better model of independence and assertion” (Nice, 1992:68).

Though Maa Tsuru does not physically drive her children into the street, but the unnatural condition in the house does. The other street-children are not that lucky. Ordarley’s mother, for example, chases Ordarley into the street. Fofu complains about her close friend’s pitiable plight:

She didn’t leave home. She was sacked. By her own mother. She sacked her like a fowl. She said Ordarley was troublesome. That Ordarley was stealing her money. She just didn’t want Ordarley around after Ordarley’s father left her for another woman and she too found another man (p. 132).

The street-children complain of lack of love, warmth and care that drive them into the street. One of the street-boys looks forward to the day he will go home and find a

look of joy on his mother's face at the sight of him. Another street-girl narrates her experience of a woman's acceptance of her person, and despite the fact that she smells awful, the woman hugs her. From the children's narration, lack of parental love and acceptance drive them into the street to fend for themselves by all means and at all cost. And in the opinion of a Nigerian linguist, "A child brought in the atmosphere of love and care is likely to cultivate a positive attitude to society than one exposed to the atmosphere of abuse and exploitation of innocence. While one will be an asset, the other constitutes a liability to the community (Nwaozuzu, 2006:33).

Amma Darko points out the effect of lack of parental love and grinding poverty at home on the children. Naturally, they run into the welcoming embrace of the street. Nwaozuzu's stance is reinforced by the opinion of William Goode that "it seems likely that the security of parental love must be great enough to permit the child to face aggression by parent or outsider without great anxiety (1972:22).

What the reader sees in the world of *Faceless* is that the physical alienation of children leads also to their emotional alienation from other children, adults and the entire society. This type of alienation is observable in Maa Tsuru's household. Fofo's two elder brothers, who leave the family for Nii Kpakpo, do not inquire into the welfare of their two younger sisters at home with their mother and her lover. They have stayed away from home for

several years and nothing has been heard of them. Baby T who is sold into prostitution in the street of Accra does not want to know the whereabouts of her younger sister, Fofu. Fofu is untouched by the mutilated body of Baby T at Agbogbloshie market. Her major interest at the sight of her sister's corpse is to snatch Kabria's handbag. Also Fofu does not have any emotional attachment to her two younger half-brothers. The epitome of street-children's emotional detachment is seen in Fofu's relationship with her mother. Not only that she refuses to sit with her, shuns her hug, but the narrator says:

Her emotions about the woman who had carried her for nine full months in the womb confused her sometimes. Deep down inside her, she felt some affection for Maa Tsuru. Yet an over-powering urge to hate her also consumed her sometimes. She often pondered over whether what she deemed to be hatred was merely a desire to cushion the pain of her existence and to blame Maa Tsuru whom she felt responsible for dumping her in the world. Because that was how she felt about herself. Dumped (p. 44).

Amma Darko is of the view that the physical and emotional alienation of the children from their families and society has some psychological implications for them. Fofu, before her rehabilitation begins, is presented as

being impulsive, aggressive and abusive. Her own mother is afraid of her and flinches at her scalding reprimands of her actions and omissions. The reader should not be surprised as this unbecoming attitude from a child is part of her survival strategy for staying in a harsh, brutish and wolfish world of the street, where there is jungle justice.

Also Poison is another character, which Darko uses to demonstrate the evil of domestic violence on children. He is one person whose psychological make up and actions can be said to be neurotic. Years after running into and surviving in the street, Poison as an adult still has the scar of his step-father's physical and emotional abuse. His psychopathic condition can be seen in his neurotic evaluation of his power as a streetlord who controls pimps, prostitutes and territories in Sodom and Gomorrah. Both adults and street-children have a mortal fear of him, as he grows up from being an abused child to being an abuser. Poison's behaviour exemplifies Ada Azodo's position on inviolability of the individual's rights and dignity. As she rightly puts it, "Human beings would turn into beasts, becoming nothing but bundles of flesh held together by animal instincts" (2007:82).

Poison is neither apologetic nor remorseful for the killing of Baby T. By his attitude, Amma Darko is trying to make a statement: the cost the entire society pays for its silences in the alienation of children. However, the alienation of children does not only happen in Accra's *Faceless*. The phenomenon has taken a global dimension.

Ikechukwu Amaechi on his “Reflections on British Way of Life” notes that apart from the breakdown of family values and children being brought up by step-fathers who physically and sexually abuse them, they are brought up by “urchins on the streets, where peer pressure is wreaking havoc on their emotional stability and the entire society harvests a heavy toll of murders”. He further states that it is disheartening when one considers the ages of these murderers and the manner they execute their victims, which seem to be a “morbid experimentation with execution styles (2007). Barely two weeks after this revealing statement, its validity is born out in the brutal murder of eleven-year-old Rhys Jones in Liverpool, Britain, by five children whose ages range from fifteen to nineteen years (CNN, August 22, 2007). There is no doubt, whatsoever, that ravages of street-life envelope the children with psychopathic hatred.

One other consequence of staying out in the street is the psychological trauma of the defiled girls. The defilement may come from a close family member and relation as in the case of Nii Kpakpo’s attempted defilement of Baby T and Onko’s actual defilement of Baby T before she is pushed out into prostitution. The two men’s action against the adolescent girl ought to be seen as part of violence on women, which Amma Darko shows in its utter ugliness in the era of globalization. But this should not be seen as only occurring in Ghana as it is a prevalent situation. As two researchers put it in their

reports from victimization surveys, court statistics and police files in the United States and Canada, which are classified as First nations, ninety to ninety-five percent of cases of assault within a family context, women are the victims of male violence (Dobash & Dobash, 1992:265).

The phobia with which Baby T rebuffs Onko's advances, despite the fact she is a full-time prostitute, is as a result of the trauma she undergoes in the hand of a trusted uncle, who breached that trust. The narrator's account of that first experience of rape is very interesting:

Baby T lay there motionless, crying. The pain was distinct in her eyes. The trauma she had suffered had left its imprint on her very person and her soul. She was in great physical and even greater mental pain. If the good Lord gave her long life, it was obvious she was going to require lots of strength and love to rebuild her dignity, herself love and trust (p. 166).

Ironically, her mother and her lover in their crooked attempt to make her a breadwinner for the family sell her into sexual slavery. The presence of Maami Broni in her house automatically symbolizes money from Baby T's prostitution. And with the acceptance of the token she earns from the street, Maa Tsuru can no longer withdraw her daughter from the street without reprisals from the streetlord. As Poison rightly warns her, she cannot claim

her alienated daughter from him as she has already lost that right, having sold her to the street. Being a cowardly, lazy woman, Maa Tsuru collects the money and keeps silent; the same silence she keeps after collecting handsome payment from Onko for defiling her daughter. But the psychological trauma of alienation and violence is not confined only to the victim. The trauma culminating from these two assiduous acts also reverberates on the psyche of the whole society. Maa Tsuru calls all men “animals” when Fofo tells her of Poison’s attempted rape. And as Koss and Cook put it, “the law defines rape as intercourse with someone unable to consent because of youth, mental illness, mental retardation, or intoxication” (1993). In Fofo and Baby T’s cases, there is no consent as they are still minors. Moreover, the shock and trauma of the gruesome murder of Baby T is encapsulated in one woman’s statement, “Ah, Madam, I tell you, whoever did that to her did not have a soul. The person definitely has no soul” (67). Though aborted fetuses and corpses litter around Agbogloboshie market and Sodom and Gomorrah, however, the reality of the side-effects of alienation of children have dawned on the society. As the narrator articulates Amma Darko’s view on that issue:

Because the consequences of the phenomenon affect the entire society of which you are an integral part... The physical and psychological effect of the detachment is to render them easily susceptible to

survival through jungle street tactics and foul means. Then me and you who thought it was their problem alone, wake up one day to the rude realization that we have no choice but to share this one society with them (p. 141).

1.3 Conclusion

Amma Darko has shown in *Faceless* that despite slave trade and colonialism, which dislocate the people's psyche and values, the greatest scourge in the new millennium in Ghana is attributable to globalization. Globalization has brought with it unprecedented devastation within the country. Ghana, indeed, wears an ugly face and that ugliness has led to the traumatization and alienation of children, the country's future hope. And if the trend is not checked, the Ghanaian society must expect more violence unleashed on it by those who have been displaced, dislocated and dispossessed. As Chimuka Tarisayi rightly puts it, "this phenomenon [violence] tends to cut across classes, marital status, ethnicity and age" (2002:120).

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Chapter 2

Womanhood as a Metaphor for Sexual Slavery in Nawal El Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero*

2.0 Introduction

For the purposes of the present convention, the term “discrimination against women” shall mean any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms or the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field (Article 1, CEDAW)

As an integral part of the globalization process in the world, The United Nations Organization has made the above provisions to protect the rights of women all over the world. However, the status of African woman has been abysmally low as “African womanhood is at the bottom of the scale. She is oppressed by her African brother; she is oppressed by other women who are not African; she is oppressed by her non-African man.... She incarnates the mass of the poor and the oppressed (Tappa: 1998). There is no doubt, whatsoever, that the low status of African womanhood is as a result of non-compliance to the humanistic legislation of the United Nations. The African writers and critics are not resting on their oars as they

work assiduously to ensure the freedom of the African woman. In the opinion of Ernest Emenyonu, African writers must set themselves the task of guiding their communities to understand where the ‘rain began to beat them’ so that they would know how to dry their bodies...” (2006: xi). For the African literary writers, therefore, the ultimate goal in the pursuit of the freedom of the African woman is the production of counter-hegemonic texts, which offer “ways for the confines of traditional gender roles to be overcome or at least challenged” (Kurtz, 1998:140).

The works of these amazons are not much concerned with the Westerners’ depiction of the African “in the most gloomy, and bizarre of colours” (Momoh, 1985:17) or the contention of perpetuation of stereotypes of the African through fixation on blackness (Achebe, 1997), but the breaking of the “reinforcement of stereotypical male chauvinistic impression about African womanhood” and the depiction of women characters as being “inferior and subordinate to men” (Bayinwa-Home, 1986:123). For the women to achieve this goal, they depict female characters that are economically and socially independent from their men. In fact, the female characters in feminist works are liberated, and a liberated woman must be one who:

... has a clear conscience about her responsibility in the society and who is economically independent. By liberated woman I mean one who is able to do

all the jobs in the society without being discriminated against, a woman who goes to school to learn, and who can become a leader. While women are fighting for their freedom at present, a new system is evolving which is preparing the young people of the next generation. And this system is trying to change their idea of liberty, their idea of freedom and their idea of co-existence between the elements of the family and within the society in general (White, 1999:113).

The African female writers, such as Flora Nwapa, Grace Ogot, Buchi Emecheta, Zaynab Alkali, Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo, Amma Darko, Efua Sutherland, Ama Ata Aidoo, to mention but these eight, made the recurrent themes of their works inundated with religious and cultural practices that are injurious to the image and status of the African woman. Such themes include motherhood, child-bride marriage, widowhood, male abandonment of traditional roles, polygamy, prostitution, child-trafficking and wife-inheritance. Their collective output in Shatto Gakwandi's view is an "embodiment of rebellion, a rebellion against the authoritarian hierarchy of traditional society (1997) and the weeding out of the societal derogatory attitude towards the African woman, who is often seen by "males as an unclaimed and degenerating commodity to be exploited in all ways, including emotionally and sexually, financially and intellectually" (Ogundipe-Leslie, 1984).

However, the works and activities of the African feminists have not gone uncriticised. Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo argues: "Despite its noble goals... feminism conjures up vision of aggressive women who try to be like men, dress carelessly and abandon essential feminine attributes (1996:1). In the opinion of the Nigerian-born critic and social commentator, feminism is a "movement of bored matriarchs, frustrated tomboys and natural termagants" (Chinweizu, 1990:118). In her reconciliatory attitude to plug the incidence of backlash, a feminist posits the vision of true feminism as "partnership with men, as genuine feminist politics brings us from bondage to freedom, from loveless to loving. Mutual partnership is the foundation of love" (Hooks, 2000:38).

But feminists with the radical bent insist on the inescapable consequences of the subjugation and marginalization of women:

When the 'Repressed' of their culture and their society come back, it is an explosive return, which is absolutely shattering, staggering, overturning with a force never let loose before, on the scale of the most tremendous repressions: for the end of the Age of Phallus, women will have been either wiped

out or heated to the highest most violent, white-hot fire. Throughout their deafening dump history, they live in dreams, embodied but still deadly silent, in silences, in voiceless rebellion (Cixous quoted in Nnaemeka, 1996:280).

One female novelist that is not left out in the liberation struggle for the African woman is the Egyptian-born radical writer, Nawal El Saadawi. In her one-hundred-and-eight-paged novel, *Woman at Point Zero*, she unabashedly exposes the lowest point of African womanhood in Egypt. The Egyptian woman is synonymous with sexual slavery. She is a sex toy in the manipulative hand of every male in her society. She is sexually defiled, raped, abused, assaulted and battered as a daughter or vagabond or lover or wife or employee or prostitute or as an accused. She points out the negative consequences of the devaluation of womanhood in her culture, and by the tragic death of her major female character, Firdaus, she proves the statement that “most deviant violent behaviour can be linked to exposure of individuals to certain stimuli from the social and political environments” (Ukiwo, 2003:131) an immutability.

Naawal El Saadawi sets her novel, *Woman at Point Zero*, at two places in Egypt. The first is an unspecified rural village where Firdaus is shown as a growing-up young girl, who does the work on the farm and in the house with her mother. She stays at home and does not go to school

but she enjoys the presence of her uncle, a student at El Azhar in Cairo. She is a curious girl who admires her uncle, but the latter defiles her sexually. Her father and mother die and her uncle takes her to his house in Cairo. She is happy with the relative freedom in the city as her uncle sends her to school. However, her uncle marries his teacher's daughter and there is no space for her in his house as the uncle's snobbish wife makes her life intolerable. She is sent to a boarding school and abandoned there. She has no place to go and devotes her time studying. She excels in her studies and graduates as one of the best in her school and the country. She comes back to her uncle's house, but his wife insists she must not stay in the house. She is married off to widowed, deformed Mahmoud, a man more than three times her age. Despite her effort to stay married, she is battered and verbally abused by her husband and runs out from the house. Her uncle and the wife push her back to Mamhoud's house and the second time she runs off, she is determined to stay out. Bayoumi offers her shelter and food in his house, but when she insists on going out to work, he brutalizes her, rapes her and invites his friends to do the same. He locks her up in the house when he is out but with the help of a female neighbor, she gains her freedom. Sharifa Saleh El Dine takes her into her luxurious apartment and introduces her to prostitution. When Fawzy informs her that she is being exploited by Dine, and she discovers that Dine is still Fawzy's woman, she leaves

her home and goes into the street. She later becomes a full-time prostitute until Di'aa tells her that prostitution is not a dignified job. She finds that at the office, where she works as a junior officer that women are also sexually abused. However, she genuinely falls in love with Ibrahim, who is a senior officer at the company. She is used, dumped and broken-hearted and she leaves the company and vows never to be used again. She goes back to prostitution but Mazourk, a pimp, surfaces and tries to control her body and her money. She finds that there is no freedom in prostitution and attempts to leave it and work, but Mazourk refuses. He beats her and attempts to stab her and she retrieves the knife from him and stabs him several times. She kills him and steps out into the street with the air of freedom. An Arab prince sees her and picks her up after much persuasion. He pays her three thousand pounds, which she tears up. He slaps her and raises an alarm and the police arrest her. She is tried, convicted and sentenced to death by hanging. Several people try to persuade her to appeal to the president for commutation of her death sentence to life imprisonment, but she refuses as her continuing to live will be a continuation of her fear and hopelessness. She is later hanged with her newly found freedom, pride and power intact.

Saadawi does not only situate the deplorable state of womanhood in Egypt, but she also uses it as a metaphor for the rape of the poor masses. This is a country in which the rich and the powerful use the subterfuge of religion to

economically exploit the citizens. And in the word of a political theorist, “The most arbitrary powers in history hide under the claim of some impersonal logic – God, the laws of nature, the laws of the market – and they always provoke a backlash when morally intolerable discrepancies become glaringly visible” (Ezrahi quoted in Friedman, 2000:191).

2.1 Womanhood as a Metaphor for Sexual Slavery

The story of the novel starts in an undisclosed rural setting in Egypt where Firdaus grows up. Saadawi does not reveal this rural setting because she wants to make a point: that the violation of the basic rights of women like denial of right to education, freedom of movement, breach of the dignity of the female are prevalent in Egypt. She masterfully uses Firdaus’s family to show the relationship between the male and female members of her society. A relationship, which may be best described as a master/slave relationship. And in John Hodge’s assessment of the family in the patriarchal, authoritarian rule, it is where the children:

... learn that it is the male’s role to work in the community and control the economic life of the family and to mete out the physical and financial punishments and rewards, and the female role to provide the emotional warmth associated with motherhood while under the economic rule of the

male. Here is where the relationship of superordination – subordination, of superior-inferior, of master-slave is first learnt and accepted as ‘natural’ (Hodge quoted in Hooks, 1984:37).

Everything in Hodge’s statement is applicable in Firdaus’ family except that the men do not work; rather, it is Firdaus and her mother, who are the family’s beast of burden. The duty of the men-folk in Firdaus’ village is to “head for the mosque to attend the weekly prayer.” After the prayer, they will comment on the “Friday sermon, on how convincing and eloquent the *Imam* had been to a degree that he surpassed the unsurpassable” (Saadawi, 1975:12). After his religious observances, the other things her father, a peasant farmer does, are to steal and sell his poisoned buffalo before it dies, sell his virgin daughter into marriage and “beat his wife and make her bite the dust” (p. 12).

It becomes the “women’s lot” (Minha-ha, 1997:31), whether as a wife or daughter to do the slave labour for sustenance of the large family. Firdaus as a young daughter in the family has the responsibility of fetching water, minding domestic animals in the field, “sweep dungs under the animals and then make rolls of dung cakes which I left in the sun to dry. On baking day I would knead dough and make bread” (p. 14). As she undergoes the “symbolic birth” (Wynter), her mother prohibits her from going to the field to look after animals. Like her

mother and stepmothers, it is her responsibility to wash her father's legs with cold water and once the holidays were over:

... my uncle would climb on the back of the donkey, and set off for the Delta Railway Station. I followed close behind carrying his big basket, packed full of eggs, cheese and baked cakes, topped with his books and clothes (p. 15)

Despite the fact that it is the womenfolk that slave for the household, despite the fact they are the ones who are subjected to physical violence and emotional turbulence, they are not paid for their labour. Firdaus' mother cannot afford to give her daughter a piastre to buy whatever she fancies. She has to go to the father who beats her up and later gives her the money. The withholding of economic empowerment from the women becomes a symbol of their continued humiliation and subjugation. Without money, the woman has no power and no freedom, but to continue in slavery. After reading the novel, one is made to understand that the patriarchal system in Egypt is one of the worst in Africa. The situation is worse than that of South African women under apartheid who are reduced to the level of domestic servants, washer-women and prostitutes. However, like their Zimbabwean sisters, their wages are lower than those of men as their white

employers pay often in kind at very low rates (Schmidt, 1992:72).

Apart from the arduous and unpaid labour, Saadawi shows that the value of these women to the men-folk are lower than that of their male children and priced domestic animals. At least, the domestic animals are fed but the selfish men are not bothered whether their children and wives have eaten any food. In Firdaus' family, there is the breach of the natural love and sacrifice a father must make for his family. As the narrator says:

My father never went to bed without supper, no matter what happened. Sometimes when there was no food at home we would all go to bed with empty stomachs. But he would never fail to have a meal. My mother will hide his food from us at the bottom of one of the holes in the oven. He will sit eating alone while we watched him. One evening I dared to stretch out my hand to his plate, but he struck me a sharp blow over the back of my fingers (pp. 18-19).

In the world of *Woman at Point Zero*, bell hook's statement, "We wish to affirm the primacy of family life because we know that family ties are the only support system for exploited and oppressed peoples" (1984:38) does not hold water. Hers is a family where she cannot point out any of the several men because she "could not

distinguish which of them was my father” (p. 13). Hers is a family where women come and go that she cannot definitely say this is her mother, for she wonders whether her mother has been “transformed into another woman who resembles her so closely that I could not tell the difference” (p. 16). All she remembers about her mother are “Two eyes to which I clung with all my might. Two eyes that alone seemed to hold me up” (p. 17). Hers is a family where children are bred “like chicks that multiply in spring, shiver in winter and loose all their feathers, and then in summer are stricken with diarrhoea, wastes away quickly and one by one creep into a corner and die” (p.18). It dawns on her like Jojolo in Bode Osanyin’s *The Noble Mistress* and Amma Darko’s *Faceless* that her home is not a home and she wonders about her identity and personhood, “I looked around almost in surprise, as though I had not been born here, but had suddenly dropped from the skies, or emerged from somewhere deep down in the earth...” (p. 16). Her emotional trauma is underscored with the powerful images of drowning and helplessness emanating from the use of this simile, “but I kept falling, buffeted by the contradictory forces that kept pulling me in different directions, like an object thrown into a limitless sea without shores and without a bed, slashed by the waters when it starts to sink, and by the wind if it starts to float” (p. 17). The novelist, in fact, foregrounds the imagery of her fear and emotional instability in the reader’s mind.

However, it has grown into the consciousness of young Firdaus that the only value a woman has is sexual gratification of the men in her life. According to Oke, human beings share certain characteristics with other animals which include “love for power and uninhabited sexual aggression” (1983:4). And to Osmond Ossie Enekwe, “Despite human spirituality, many people are less able to control their sexual urge than some animal species.... Dogs demonstrate better control of their sexuality than human beings” (2007:3). Firdaus observes very early in life that in winter nights, her father shifts her mat and pillow to the small room, which faces the north and occupies her own position in the oven room, “And instead of staying by my side to keep me warm, my mother used to abandon me alone and go to my father and keep him warm” (p. 17) and she recollects, “a little boy called Mohammadain used to pinch me under water and follow me into the small shelter made of maize stalks. He would make me lie down between a pile of straw, and lift up my *galabeya*.... From some part of my body, where, exactly I did not know, would come a sensation of sharp pleasure” (p.14). As she is circumcised and confined to the house, she is no longer a sexual toy to little Mohammadain but she is sexually defiled by her uncle, whom when her “*galabeya* often slipped up my thighs, but I paid no attention until the moment when I would glimpse my uncle’s hand moving slowly from behind the book he was reading to touch my leg. The next moment I would feel it

traveling up my thigh with a cautious, stealthy, trembling movement" (p. 14). The vicissitudes of women as chattels for sex abuse are seen in Sharifa Dine calling men, "sons of dogs" and in her loaded question, "Which of them started it? Your father, your brother..., one of your uncles?" (p. 52).

To ensure the continued sexual gratification of the men, the patriarchal system prescribes dress code and circumcision for the women. Firdaus' inability to identify her mother is because she is always dressed in "the same long garments", the same face because all the women are veiled. The seriousness of the situation is seen in her statement that to "this very moment I do not know whether they [the mother's eyes] were wide or narrow, nor can I recall if they were surrounded by lashes or not" (p. 17). She, therefore, cannot differentiate her mother from her stepmothers because they all resemble one another. However, she associates her mother's eyes, like those of her teacher, Iqbad, with the images of love, emotion, humaneness and kindness as she repeatedly foregrounds this imagery of light and darkness, where light triumphs over darkness:

All I can remember are two rings of intense white around two circles of intense black. I only had to look into them for the white to look whiter and the black even blacker, as though sunlight was pouring into them from some magical source neither on

earth, nor in the sky, for the earth was pitch black,
and the sky dark as night, with no sun and no moon
(Saadawi, 1975:16).

She uses the same imagery of light and darkness in the description of her stepmother's and uncle's wife's eyes. However, in their own case, the darkness triumphs over light. Her stepmother's eyes were not "two rings of pure white surrounding two circles of intense black, where the white would become even whiter, and the black even blacker every time I looked into them, as though the light of the sun or the moon kept flowing through them". And she still insists that "No light seemed ever to touch the eyes of this woman, even when the day is radiant and the sun at its very brightest" (p. 18). She goes to the extent of taking her face in her hands and turning it to the sun to see whether the sun's light can reflect on them, she is perturbed because her eyes remained "dull, impervious to its light, like two extinguished lamps" (p. 14). This imagery is reserved for those women, who exhibit so much cruelty and emotionlessness, because of their traumatic upbringing in a brutal, patriarchal system.

Circumcision is another method through which women's sexuality is caged and controlled by the men. Female circumcision has been described as a "psychologically and often physically harmful and painful experience, yet elderly women who have been circumcised themselves still continue to circumcise their

daughters” (Allan, 2005:19). Firdaus narrates her painful experience of circumcision thus: “... she [her mother] brought a woman who was carrying a small knife or maybe a razor blade. They cut off a piece of flesh from between my thighs. I cried all night” (p. 13). This transition from childhood into adulthood is both a religious and cultural practice. In her critical assessment of women’s role in the dissemination of culture, Angeline Archterberg states, “... it is mostly the women who develop and propagate the culture of their people and pass it on to future generations” (1998).

In Nawal El Saadawi’s nonfictional fiction, which she presents in filmic snapshots, the novel’s setting shifts from an unnamed rural dwelling to the city of Cairo, as Firdaus’ uncle takes her to the city after her parent’s demise. This setting in Cairo is very crucial to the metaphor of womanhood as sexual slavery in the novel. This is because it is often believed that the “city, because it disrupts traditional social patterns, and despite its customary nature as a male environment, can be a place where women are able to create some measure of personal emancipation. Women can free themselves from dependence on fathers, husbands or other men – particularly if they can find employment” (Kurtz, 1998:137). Firdaus finds out to her chagrin that her life in Cairo does not give her automatic freedom she desires because the “existing social structures that encourage or endorse that relegation have neither been eradicated nor

significantly restructured nor revised" (Nwahunanya, 2003:195). It dawns on her that her lot in what Kenneth Little in his sociological classification of urban women in African literature calls a "male-inspired categories for the libidinal pleasures of men..." (1980).

Her life with her uncle has its sad and joyful moments until he gets married. At least, he sends her to primary school; for the first time she wears a pair of shoes; for the first time she wears a "dress that reached down no further than her knees; for the first time, she can look at her face in the mirror; for the first time, she plays with boys and girls in the school without being caged; for the first time, she is taken to the cinema, where she sees a woman dancing, her thighs naked and "a man hugging a woman" (p. 22). In return for his great favours, she does the household chores and continues to be used as his sexual plaything as "his great long fingers were seized with a strange trembling which I could feel under my hand. It was familiar, like a trembling experienced in childhood, a distant dream still remembered" (p. 21). Like Mohammadain who would arouse her natural sexual urge before her circumcision, whom she would try to hold back," but he would run off, promising to come back next day" (p. 14), her uncle who defiles her cannot satisfy her sexual urge because, as a woman ought not to preempt the man:

When I hid my head under the eiderdown, I would listen intently for the sound of his footsteps. I held my breath and pretended to be asleep, waiting for his fingers to reach out for me. An eternity seemed to pass without anything happening. I could hear his bed creak as he lay down, followed after sometime by the sound of his regular snoring. Then, only, was I assured that he had fallen asleep (Saadawi, 1975:23).

Firdaus' seemingly blissful life with her emotional stability in her uncle's house is shattered as soon as he gets married to the daughter of his teacher at El Azhar. This marriage which is not out of love but for convenience as it affords him social and economic upward mobility in a straight-jacketed hierarchical society. From the moment she steps into the house, the woman detests Firdaus' presence in the house. She cannot accommodate her even as a maid as she complains that she eats too much, cannot cook well and is generally lazy and leaden-footed. But the truth of the matter is that the older woman is aware of the status of womanhood in her culture. She continues to chaperon her as she cannot trust her with her husband or with the other maid, whom she prefers to Firdaus. As she complains, "On a cold night I told her [the servant girl] to come and sleep with me in the bed, but when my uncle's wife entered the room and saw us, she beat her. Then she

beat me also" (p.24). She then persuades the uncle to send her to a boarding school.

Firdaus as a student in an all-girls-secondary school is an exceptionally brilliant student. She is abandoned in school and nobody visits her. And "like a prisoner condemned to look at life over the top of a high prison wall" (p. 24), she watches other students, who are visited or taken home on Thursday and Friday. However, despite her unglamorous life at school, she is a naturally brilliant girl and reads voraciously. At the end, she is the second in her class and the seventh nationwide. Her coming out of school with flying colours proves Baye's wisdom that "man would see himself overtaken in every domain in which he'd be in competition with woman. We can see that today: if you have children, you will see that each time a boy competes with a girl, she will get ahead of him" (Niasse, 2005:425).

According to the narrator in the novel under discussion, the simile of imprisonment is reinforced by the ever presence of the female superintendent "who walked around the boarding house on tiptoe, spying on us day and night, listening to what we had to say. Even when we slept she kept a vigilant eye on our every movement, followed us as we dreamed. If one of us so much as sighed, or emitted a sound, or made the slight movement in our dream, she would pounce on her like a bird of prey" (p.24-25). Firdaus' life as a girl in a female boarding school in Cairo must have been as hellish as Enitan's experience in

the boarding school in Lagos in Sefi Attah's *Everything Good Will Come*. But her life in the school is mellowed down by the presence of a humane female teacher, Miss Iqbad, whom she describes with the imagery of light that overcomes darkness in the human soul like her mother. It is Iqbad who receives her certificate and gift on their graduation night as Firdaus sits alone in the crowded hall, overcome by fright. However, hers is a system where emotions, particularly those of love and humaneness, are never exhibited openly. As she leaves the school for the last time, she desires to see Miss Iqbad and bid her farewell, but this is not possible as seen in this description:

My own voice awakened from what appeared to be a dream, like a person talking out loud in his sleep. The darkness seemed to lift revealing a low unplastered brick wall about the size of an average person. It was a wall which I had seen before, yet for a brief moment I felt as though it had been built that instant (p. 34).

This same powerful imagery that gives out the mental impression of blockade, darkness and inhibition is also used in her unrequited love for Ibrahim, who used her and dumped her to marry the company chairman's daughter. In her inability to see Iqbad, the imagery is used to show dashed hope, dashed expectations, dashed emotions and its use in her friendship with Ibrahim represents dashed

marriage, and dashed love occasioned by the strict social stratification. Hers is a soulless, emotionless and loveless society. Her inability to see Iqbad before she leaves the school may be contrasted with a warm farewell between Mr. Doe, a school teacher and his student in Gheysika Agambila's *Journey*.

"I think so. What you've said really tickles my mind. I wish I could stay and talk some more, I'm packing my things. You know Yakubu and I have always enjoyed coming here."

"You'll have to make it another time. Come back and see us another time. You students, when you leave this place, you forget that you left behind friends" (2006:98).

As Firdaus leaves school, she stays briefly with her uncle and his family. Her uncle's wife who cannot tolerate her presence in the house plans to bundle her out again to the university. Her plan fails because her uncle who is a Sheikh cannot send her to a university "where she will be sitting side by side with men" (p. 36). Moreover, he is not ready to make the sacrifices, which his aggrieved aunt, who sells her gold necklace, makes for him. Firdaus, with "no place for me in this house except on the sofa, a small wooden couch placed in the dining room close up against the thin wall..." (p. 35), isolated and ignored in the house except

the toddler, Hala, decides to leave the house before her uncle and his wife sell her into marriage like cattle. But as a vagabond in the street, she realizes to her consternation that the street is not for women, particularly the unmarried ones. While wandering in the street, she finds herself in the same state of confusion as when she is in the father's house as she says, "I could see the wide expanse of street stretched out before me like the sea. There I was, just a pebble which someone had tossed into its waters, rolling along with the crowd that rode in buses or cars... Each minute a thousand eyes passed in front of me, but for them I remained non-existent" (p. 41). Her loneliness and the emotional vacuum in her are encapsulated in the metaphor and imagery from the word "pebble". She quickly decides to abandon her new-found-freedom and runs back to the safety of the uncle's house as she notices a strange man's unmasked, aggressive and lustful eyes "dropped their gaze with slow intent down to my shoes, rested there for a moment, then gradually started to climb up my legs, to my thighs, my belly, my breasts, my neck and finally came to a stop, fastening themselves steadily in my eyes, with the same cold intent" (p. 41-42). Later she will realize that the aggressiveness and lust in the stranger's eyes are what to be found in every man's eyes, when a woman is not anchored to any man. Firdaus' assessment of Bayoumi is wrong because he has a deceptive look and carriage. As Osmond Ossie Enekwe states, "Humans work very hard to present good image of

themselves in public through dress codes and composure" (2007:2). This statement applies to Bayoumi when Firdaus describes him as a non-violent person, "His eyes were resigned and calm. They did not seem to me like the eyes of someone who would kill. His hands looked obedient, almost submissive, their movements quiet, relaxed. They did not impress me as the hands of someone who could be violent and cruel" (p. 47). It is Bayoumi who takes her into his house when she runs away from the husband's house; it is the same Bayoumi who is the first person to ask her the choice to eat oranges or tangerines. However, things fall out between the two when Firdaus insists that she wants to go out and work, instead of being kept in the house. Bayoumi gets angry because she raises her voice while speaking to him. He batters her, rapes her and gets his friends to do the same. They abuse her, and he locks her up whenever he is going out. In Firdaus' experience as a vagabond in Bayoumi's house, Nawal El Saadawi makes a statement: there is no hiding place for the woman: she is a sex object, and a beast of burden to be battered by any man in her life.

Nawal El Saadawi beams her searchlight on another aspect of the womanhood as a metaphor for sexual slavery in Egypt—marriage. In her autobiographical work, *A Daughter of Isis*, she insists on the calamity that is marriage, "I was still a child and did not realize what the word God meant, but it became linked in my mind to the word calamity, which in turn had something to do with

what they called marriage (1999:40). The experiences of all the married female characters in *Woman at Point Zero* show that marriage is another name for degradation of womanhood. Firdaus recounts that her mother's marriage to the father is a disastrous one. She does all the work in the house, satisfies the man's sexual urge, stays without food, washes the husband's feet; yet, she is battered whenever any of the husband's domestic animals or one of his sons dies. Her uncle's wife is above him in social status, being the daughter of one of his teachers at El Azhar, she never participates in drudgery like washing his feet; he doesn't abuse her, he was "extremely polite, but treated her with the peculiar kind of courtesy devoid of true respect which men reserve for women. I sensed that his feelings for her were one of "fear than of love, and that she came from a higher social class than his" (p.23). Though he is a Sheikh, a holy and educated man, the narrator says, "But my uncle told me that all husbands beat their wives, and my uncle's wife added that her husband often beats her.... The precepts of religion permitted such punishment" (p. 44). In the case of Egyptian women, therefore, religion becomes an instrument with which married women are degraded and oppressed. But Bartholomew Chidili says, "Since religion is what human beings do, it follows that at times there are some abuses just like other human acts" (2005:42). This abuse of religion may be true since the Friday's sermon in mosques includes, "For was it not verily true that stealing

was a sin, and killing was a sin, and defaming the honour of a woman was a sin, and injustice was a sin, and beating another human being was a sin...?" (p.12); however, if the Islamic religion is not abused by its followers, then it means that the Quran never intends that women should be included in this injunction. In other words, women are seen as non-persons and unrecognized by the holy book. In that case, women may be beaten as the men do.

Firdaus, in her own case, is sold to old Mahmoud from whom the uncle and the wife extort very huge dowry. Firdaus' consent is not needed. After all, as her uncle's wife puts it, Firdaus does neither have any inheritance nor an income of her own. Therefore, she ought to be happy that a man who is as old as her father, with all his deformity and stinginess, agrees to marry her. Saadawi by Firdaus marriage to Mahmoud subtly deals a blow on child-bride marriage in her culture and the rigid social stratification that hems in the daughters of the poor. While her uncle can marry into a middle class family despite his poor background, Firdaus is condemned to either marry an old man from the middle class or a man from her own social background. She also highlights the denial of education and meaningful employment to women, which perpetuate their poverty.

In Firdaus' marriage, the same trauma she sees her mother going through with her father plays itself out in her own case. Though Mahmoud is financially comfortable, he is very stingy and grudges over the wife's

food. He is always there “looking at my plate while I ate, and if I left anything over he picked it up, put it in his mouth and after swallowing, quickly told me off for my wastefulness” (p. 43). Despite his age and deformity, as she says, “He was already over sixty, whereas I had not yet turned nineteen. On his chin, below the lip, was a large swelling with a hole in the middle. Some days the hole would be dry, but on other days it would turn into a rusty tap exuding drops red in colour like blood, or whitish yellow, like pus” (p. 43), which she endures, she is battered. And she has to bear the violence he unleashes on her like every other married woman because, “A girl is not supposed to be violent or be at places where there are violent scenes. She is not supposed to be self-opinionated, assertive and defiant” (Orabueze, 2006:206).

Ironically and unlike the recurrent theme of motherhood in West African literary texts, the ultimate goal for marriage in the world of the novel is not motherhood but sexuality. Motherhood is a secondary factor men consider in marriage. Mahmoud is not worried that Firdaus is not pregnant and no mention is made of any child in his previous marriage. Firdaus’ father breeds a lot of children and they die like fowls but he exchanges women like his underpants, what is uppermost in his mind is his personal comfort. Firdaus recollects, “My mother was no longer there, but instead there was another woman.... My father said she was my mother. In fact, she looked exactly like my mother.... For like most people, I

had many brothers and sisters" (p. 18). The women come and go in a man's life since "Unilateral divorce by the husband... remains valid according to the Sharia; modern laws have tried to mitigate this but the woman is still disadvantaged" (Hinnells, 1995:302). And Joseph Onyekwere reflecting on the consequences of separation and divorce warns they "unleash series of traumatic events over which one may have little control" (2006:27). The traumatic experience of that is seen in the harvest of the death of Firdaus' brothers and sisters.

In these arranged marriages, there is the absence of emotions, particularly on the man's side. He simply sees the marriage as a means of assuaging his sexual desires within the ambit of religious code, a way of procreation of sons and procurement of cheap or inexpensive slave labour. For the woman, she is voiceless in the choice of her suitor, as in Firdaus' case. Either the father or her brother or her uncle or any of her male relations chooses a suitor for her. If she dares to reject their choice, unpleasant consequences may flow from the rejection. In Turkey, for example, there is the cultural practice of "honour killing" in which a woman may be killed for rejecting her family's choice of suitor or for dating a man who is objectionable to the family or being seen with a man in public places (Cable News Network, 2007). A married woman's degradation must have been the lowest and that must have necessitated Nawal El Saadawi's overt title to her work, *Woman at Point Zero*. Marriage in the

world of the novel is the worst experience in a woman's life. As Harolds Scheub puts it, "The husband is seen as an adversary, a negative force to be brought into the framework of the house of birth. The move to the house of marriage is a move into a drought-stricken area where she and her children are at the mercy of her husband" (2003:317). Firdaus insists that the lowest status of a woman is wifehood because she is totally enslaved and emasculated by the husband. A married woman is more devalued than a daughter, or a vagabond, or a prostitute, or a female employee. Her labour and sexuality are exploited without payment. All women are enslaved, and she is disillusioned that:

All women are victims of deception. Men impose deception on women and punish them for being deceived, force them down to the lowest level and punish them for falling so low, bind them in marriage and then chastise them with menial service for life, or insults or blows. Now I realized that the least deluded of all women was the prostitute. That marriage was a system built on the most cruel suffering for women (pp. 86-87).

Moreover, Nawal El Saadawi in *Woman at Point Zero* x-rays the life of a prostitute to show another metaphor of womanhood: still her sexuality. Having realized that wifehood is the worst status of a woman, having realized that hers is a society that does not have any space for a

woman's growth, she decides to go into prostitution. The first step into the profession is to be recruited as an apprentice by the successful and glamorous prostitute, Sharifa Dine. She says, "I became a young novice in Sharifa's hands" (p.54). Like Jojolo in Bode Osanyumi's *The Noble Mistress* and Baby T in Amma Darko's *Faceless*, Firdaus must go through pupilage under the eagle-eyed and experienced Sharifa. Sharifa tutors her that prostitution must be seen as a means to an end. In the novel, therefore, prostitution becomes a metaphor for survival and freedom. It is a means of survival because it gives her all the good things she has never afforded in her life either as a daughter, or as a wife, or as a student, or as a vagabond. It is through prostitution she can live in a clean environment hedged with roses. It is through the proceeds of her prostitution that her "body filled with a warmth as soft as the touch of the silken clothes in which I dressed, or the bed in which I slept" (p. 55). It is through the rewards from prostitution that she has "warmth of good food ran through my body with the blood in my veins" (p. 68). It is from prostitution that "My bank account kept mounting all the time" (p. 69). Firdaus also notes the freedom she enjoys as a prostitute. She can afford to engage someone as a cook, and another as a cleaner. She has the freedom to arrange her affairs as she wants them; relax whenever she feels like; go to the cinema, or theatre; read newspapers, or befriend whoever she wants to. Besides, she has a choice to dictate which

man to take to bed as a customer and fix a price for her body. Most importantly, it is in prostitution that she loses her fear of the street and feels liberated; it is in prostitution that she realizes the power of money—money gives choices, power and honour.

As Sharifa tells her, a man will do anything to get a woman if she rejects him. He may go to the extent of stealing from another person to pay her. As a successful prostitute, she realizes that men don't like being spurned by women. An Arab prince pays three thousand pounds to have her. The police threaten her with detention for not being patriotic for refusing to sleep with a foreign dignitary.

Ironically, despite the gains from prostitution which Firdaus' birth, education and marriage cannot bestow on her, she finds out that prostitution has its own hazards. It dawns on her that her earlier summation of prostitution as a means of survival is an erroneous one. First, Sharifa exploits her, while she bears the pain, Sharifa pockets the money paid by her clients as an apprentice. Even as a successful prostitute, she finds out that apart from pimps beating, collecting her money and raping her, ironically, the money she makes enriches the other presumed dignified professionals like doctors, who abort unwanted fetuses for the prostitutes, the lawyer who defends her or bribes given to judges to release her, or the money she uses to buy police protection. She finds out that the freedom, which she thinks she has in prostitution is non-

existent as religious, social and legal apparatuses are installed by men to make it impossible for any woman to have genuine freedom, no matter her position in society.

Nawal El Saadawi with her mastery of ironies interwoven into *Woman at Point Zero* shows that Firdaus statement that the lowest position of womanhood is not wifehood but prostitution. As a prostitute, a woman becomes a rolling stone without any anchor. At least a married woman can quit her marriage without the husband molesting her. After all, Firdaus leaves old Mahmoud without resistance from the man. However, in an ironic twist, she realizes her notion of freedom in the street has been misconceived. Like Jacknobody, Jojolo's pimp in Bode Osanyin's *The Noble Mistress*, or the famous streetlord, Poison, in Amma Darko's *Faceless*, Firdaus' pimp, Marzourk, insists that she cannot leave the street to look for a job. The pimps insist that there is always a price to be paid. In Jojolo's case, Jacknobody stabs the father to death; Poison murders Baby T and dumps her body in the market, and in Firdaus', she kills Marzourk in self-defense as he attempts to stab her for insisting on leaving prostitution.

Saadawi wants the reader to understand that despite the little freedoms in prostitution, it is also as arduous as the drudgery of a wife's chores. Prostitution neither requires emotional attachment nor sexual pleasure; it is simply a business, but a very strenuous one because "I never used to leave the house. In fact, I never even left the

bedroom. Day and night I lay on the bed crucified, and every hour a man would come in" (p. 57). Unfortunately, Firdaus does not live long to experience the wear and tear involved in prostitution unlike Jojolo.

She finds it a disgusting profession, which she sees as a necessary evil. She no longer sleeps with the likes of Bayoumi with his black nails or her uncle's with dark earth on the underside, her men are now those in the upper stratification of her society. They are educated, married and wealthy men; yet, she finds sex with them very disgusting:

Their swollen heavy paunches hung down with too much food, and their sweat ran copiously, filling their nostrils with a foetid smell, like stagnant water, as though it had been held back in their bodies for a long time. They dug their long nails into my flesh and I closed my lips tightly trying to stifle any expression of pain, hold back a scream... (p. 57).

Firdaus finds out that the worst part of prostitution is that the prostitute is treated contemptuously and her profession seen as undignifying. The worst moment of psychological and emotional trauma is when Di'aa tells her "You are not respectable" (p. 70). She describes the terrible experience in simile with images of violence:

... my head vibrated with an incessant movement that kept on without respect, throughout the day

and throughout the night, like the ebb and flow of waves on a shore, seething and foaming and bubbling like boiling water. A sound like the roar of an angry sea went back and forth from my ears to the pillow...my heartbeats racing in a low like a hammer in my head ringing out one phrase with every blow: 'not respectable', 'not respectable'.... Wherever I went the words clung to me cold and sticky like spit, like the spit of an insult echoing in the air, like the spit of insolent eyes over my naked body, like the spit of all the degrading words,... like the spit of all the brazen eyes that undressed me,... like the spit of courteous eyes that looked aside as I shed my clothes, hiding their contempt under respected guise (pp. 71-72).

Nawal El Saadawi purposefully decides to foreground the imagery of degradation, disgust, violence and permanence. This is to emphasize that, in fact, it is not really a married woman that is at the lowest level of the society, but the prostitute. Successful prostitutes like Firdaus, for instance, delude themselves that they are free, but the society, including the men who use them feel that they are the dregs of womanhood. Paolo Bono and Sandra Kemp argue persuasively:

... it is significant the way yet again an attempt is being made to lay all the weight and moral blame on the women rather than on the clients who allow

themselves to pay a human being to gratify their own sexual pleasures. Prostitution is a product of the patriarchal society, which invented the double standard of the patriarchal-capitalist society that excludes women from the work market, pushes them into consumerism and forces them to various forms of prostitution in order to survive (1991:65).

Firdaus decides to rehabilitate herself when she realizes that she and her job are not respectable. She searches for and finds employment in an office. Her employment as a junior worker in a company provides the novelist the opportunity to show another aspect of the degradation of womanhood in Egypt. Apart from the discrimination the junior workers face on the ground of their position, female workers are subjected to sexual harassment. They are sex objects, offer themselves for trivials like “a meal, a good yearly report, or to ensure that they would not be treated unfairly, discriminated against, or transferred” (pp. 75-76). A female employee is afraid of losing her job and she pays the price of her illusory fear with her life, her health, her body, and her mind. In Firdau’s assessment of the social and economic status of a woman in paid employment, she is better than a wife but lower than a prostitute, for she pays the “highest price for things of the lowest value” (p. 76).

In the office, she refuses a lift with men, shuns sleeping with any of them that she is deemed one of the

best of the employees as she dedicates herself solely to her job. However, she falls in love with Ibrahim, who is acclaimed to be a revolutionary, who talks about justice and abolition of privileges. He later marries the daughter of the company's chairman. The other workers say "He's a clever lad, and deserves whatever good fortune that may come to him. He has a bright future to look forward to, and will rise quickly in the company" (p. 83). She is broken-hearted as it dawns on her that her poverty is a stumbling brick wall to her. She later realizes that Ibrahim had never been in love with her, but he came to her because he did not pay for her sexuality. She believes that revolutionary men are like prostitutes: they use what they have to get what they don't have. Therefore, revolution is a means to an end like prostitution. As Firdaus leaves the company to go back to prostitution, which she has abandoned, she rejects the society that has rejected her. From then on she becomes a rebel. When she is pushed to kill Mazourk, presumably in self-defence, and she stands accused in court, she is not as afraid of losing her life. Her stabbing the pimp several times is a symbolic act of purgation of years of accumulated fear and enslavement as her act of bathing herself after sex with Mahmoud is a symbol of purification. After the killing, there are signs of freedom from slavery and fear. Her body is as light as feather; her head held high to the heavens; her footsteps break the silence of the night with steady rhythmic beat. In this type of high spirit, she looks like a respectable, upper-class

woman that an Arab prince thinks her so and offers to sleep with her for three thousand pounds. When he pays her the money, she tears the notes into small pieces that the prince believes that she is truly a princess. However, the tearing of the money is another symbolic act of the tearing of men's hold on her. It is with money that men entice women. Men's power depends on the money they deny their daughters and wives. It is money that they use to enslave the prostitutes. Money becomes a symbol of power, which must be destroyed.

As an accused standing trial for murder, the legal defenses of self-defence and lack of guilty mind do not apply to her. This is intentionally done as Nawal El Saadawi wants to point out that women who are accused of any criminal act are degraded. She is sentenced to death not for killing a man, but she is the only woman who has the courage to tear the mask of men's deception and criminality. She stubbornly refuses to ask for pardon from the president as living will entail the life of wants, hopelessness, fears and enslavement. As a true rebel, she chooses death to life because:

The rebel says No and Yes. He says No to conditions considered intolerable, and Yes to that something within him which is worthwhile... and which must be taken into consideration. To say No means that the oppressor has overstepped his bounds, and there is a limit beyond which he/she shall not go. It

means that oppression can be endured no longer in the style that the oppressor takes for granted. To say No is to reject categorically the humiliating orders of the master... to say No means that death is preferable to life, if the later is devoid of freedom. Better to die on one's feet than to live on one's knees (Camus quoted in Cone, 1969:7).

2.2 Womanhood as Metaphor for the Rape of the Citizens

The rape of Egypt and Egyptians, Nawal El Saadawi presents in the metaphor of womanhood. The exploitation of the people by the leaders is a prevalent situation on the continent. Whether militocracy or democracy or monarchy, Africans suffer the same debilitating and devastating fate, for the ideals of African unions are unrealized as it is seen as an "Assembly of African heads of states, many of whom were part of the anti-democratic trend in their own countries" (Cooper, 2002:184). Also in the economic and political assessment of Egypt, in particular, it is found that it is "unlikely ever to join the ranks of wealthy nations for its problems of poverty and numbers are simply too great... its per capita income puts it at the top end of the low income economies" (Guy, 1997:192).

From the very first beginning of the novel, Firdaus makes it clear that her father is a peasant farmer, living in an unidentified rural area. There is no doubt that the basic modern facilities like schools and pipe-borne water are

lacking in the village. This is because she says her uncle goes to school at El Azhar in Cairo and, that she fetches water, presumably from the stream. The men and women in this village are uneducated, but the men go to the mosque every Friday to listen to the *Imam's* sermon. One thing that these peasants have in common is that they speak in "guttural subdued tones", and they have "stealthy eyes, eyes ready to pounce, full of aggressiveness that seemed strangely servile" (p. 13). Among these men, Firdaus cannot distinguish her father from the other peasants because he "resembled them so closely that it was difficult to tell" (p. 13). It naturally follows that these men are seen as a mass and not individuals like their women. These men whose rights are violated vent their anger on their wives and daughters.

Islamic religion and religious leaders also come under Nawal El Saadawi's venomous attack. Religion is used as a mask for the degradation of the populace, and religious men encourage the people to deify their rulers. As the narrator says: "Allah protect our ruler for many long years and may he remain a source of inspiration and strength to our country" (p. 12-13).

As the degradation of womanhood is pervasive so also is the degradation of the masses. As *Women at Point Zero's* setting moves from the rural dwelling to Cairo, so also does Nawal explore the theme of the exploitation of the people in the city. In the newspapers and magazines in Firdaus's library, she often sees the face of one ruler or the

other as he pretends to be praying, but she can detect the falsehood for he believes he can “deceive Allah the same way as he deceived the people” (p. 27). She also observes the members of his retinue with “stealthy eyes, ready to pounce, full of an aggressiveness that touched on the servile” (p. 27). The retainers, which must be the ruler’s bodyguards, are ready to pounce on the dissidents. Their prayers are for the souls of the nation’s martyrs who had lost their lives as a result of war, famine or pestilence. Firdaus does not believe them for she is aware that the poor are dispossessed of their land, and they only fight to protect the land of the rich and powerful members of the society. During the famine, some of the poor die off as a result of man-made impoverishment, because the rich have so much to eat and the poor little or nothing at all. Firdaus has the gruesome experience of grinding poverty as a growing up child in her village. The pestilence may be preventable if facilities are put in place for the poor. Religion again is shown as an instrument for the delusion of and the exploitation of the people. The people are intimidated into silence. As Sule Eyya puts it, “... the land has been surviving on falsehood. Lies are woven and told to pave the way for the oppressor. The people are frightened from speaking the truth” (2006:320).

In the world of *Woman at Point Zero*, the words “nationalism”, “patriotism” and “heroism” acquire a special meaning. The nationalists are the damned of Egypt, who are sacrificed for the rich and powerful to continue in

their debauchery. These are faces of the poor and underprivileged masses whose lives are blighted. They are the people that Firdaus observes in the street when she runs away from the uncle's house to avoid being sold to Mahmoud like a carmel. She comments on their looks:

There were people walking on the street who wore shabby, torn clothes and downtrodden shoes. Their faces were pale, their eyes dull, resigned, weighed down with a certain sadness and worry.... When the bus came to a stop at the station, or slowed down I could glimpse the jaundiced faces shining with sweat and the bulging eyes expressing a certain fear (pp 40-41).

On the other hand, the patriots in this context are those who do dishonorable things, and, yet they are awarded national honours as patriots. When Firdaus rejects the advances of a foreign dignitary as a prostitute, the police threaten her with imprisonment for not being patriotic. She realizes the irony in the love of one's country, and that for fulfilling a national duty a "prostitute could be awarded the highest honours, and murder could become an act of heroism" (p. 90). For a citizen to be recognized as being honourable, he must use dishonourable means at his disposal to get and keep his honour. To keep her image as an honourable woman, Firdaus pays lawyers handsomely to defend criminal charges against her; she bribes judges to discharge and acquit her from criminal charges; she

pays the police to release her from detention or not to arrest her for her illegal trade, and doles out handsome rewards to journalists to launder her image in the national newspapers and magazines.

Heroes for Firdaus are the rulers, who use their positions to enrich themselves and unleash untold hardship on the ruled. These are the men and women who play on the people's nationalist fervor. In the opinion of Wright L. Marcheta, the exploiters "Under the guise of state fealty, elite decision-makers manipulate nationalism to create, in its less destructive forms, a rally-around-the-flag support for policies. In its most conservative forms, it is xenophobia; most malevolently, it justifies genocidal policies" (Marcheta quoted in Vaughan, 2005:33). In *Woman at Point Zero*, the wealthy ones who rode in cars, who have broad, fleshy shoulders, whose cheeks are full and rounded, who have stealthy eyes filled with fear, which are full of aggression and ready to pounce on the people are the heroes.

The heroes also include the men in history books who have "distorted personality, a never-ending appetite for money, sex and unlimited power" (Saadawi, 1975:27). The deified rulers with their retinue of bodyguards, whose pictures appear in newspapers and magazines, are also considered to be present day heroes. Heroes and heroic exploits do not exclude Firdaus's wealthy clientele who have "swollen leather wallets in their inner pockets" and their "heavy paunches hung down with too much food"

(p.57). The image of heroes is personified in the Arab prince, who pays three thousand pounds to have sexual intercourse with a prostitute. Firdaus describes his body as “full of flesh from years of eating beyond his needs, beyond his greed” (p. 97), his foolishness like that of an idiot, and his wastefulness she says, “all you do is to spend the thousands you take from your starving people on prostitutes” (p. 100). When the police arrest her for slapping a prince and hero, she retorts that he is a criminal.

The words ‘nationalism’, ‘patriotism’ and ‘heroism’ acquire special significance in the novel under review. Nationalism acquires the semantic features /+exploitation/, /+death/ and patriotism /+crookedness/ while heroism has /+criminality/. The general overview of the significance of these semantics features, therefore, “suggests that statist and hegemonial logics seem organized around the pursuit of ends which rarely include a serious commitment of national resources to the promotion of human rights (Falk, 1991:59). The masses have fear in their eyes as well as the leaders. But while the masses’ fear may be as a result of the absence of what to eat and the danger of dying in wars to protect the interest of the rich and powerful, that of the leaders may be as a result of insurrection from the exploited and dehumanized masses.

In the metaphor of womanhood as the rape of the masses of Egypt, one other group of people that is heavily

disenfranchised by the state is the Egyptian woman. Chinua Achebe recognizes this injustice to women among others in his address at the Memorial Service for James Baldwin on 16th December at the University of Massachusetts where he says, "As long as injustice exists whether it be within the American nation itself,... as long as tiny cartel of rich, creditor nations can hold the rest in iron chains of usury; as long as one third or less of mankind eats well and often to excess while two-thirds or more live perpetually with hunger; as long as white people... a mere fraction of the human race... dominate the rainbow majority; and the oldest of them all – the discrimination by men against women... the words of James Baldwin will... inspire and elevate the struggle for human freedom" (1988:121). In the opinions of literary critics and social scientists, though, not all women are marginalized in every part of the African continent in the political dispensation. For a German feminist believes, "Many African women are notable for their strong personality and dominant character" (Arndt, 2002:28). Zulu Sofola maintains that traditional heroines left indelible marks through very active participation in "gender-based power-lines" (1998:91). Besides, Sa'ad Abubakar is of the view that before Arabs' and Berbers' incursions into Hausaland, "women appear to have been the early political masters" (1992). And Basil Davidson acknowledges the participation of women in the self-governing framework of pre-colonial Igboland (1998:127).

In Niara Surdakasa's research on the Yoruba ethnic group in Nigeria, she says women "were queen-mothers, queen-sisters, princesses, chiefs... occasional warriors". However she says there is no such participation in "highly Islamized societies in Sub-Saharan Africa in pre-colonial times" (1986:91).

From Niara Surdakasa's opinion, Nawal El Saadawi is right in her presentation of the exclusion of women in the politics of Egypt, and this is to be attributable to its religion – Islam. Firdaus says that in Friday morning prayers of the peasants in her village, only the men are seen. And in history books, magazines and newspapers she reads in the school's library, only the men are written about. She contends that only the men are headlines in newspapers and magazines, and the women are not written about as they are merely concubines. And her first act of rebellion is to spit on the faces of these men in the newspapers. She, therefore, sees her life with that of the other women in the political enclave as a prison which is meant to crush your individuality completely, to turn you into a docile being from whom no resistance can arise, to terrorize you and intimidate you into silence" (Mandela,1985).

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Chapter 3

Our Endangered Values: The Challenges of Parenthood in the 21st Century in Chukwuemeka Ike's *Our Children Are Coming!* and Bode Osanyin's *The Noble Mistress*

3.0 Introduction

Critical analyses of any text could take different perspectives: Marxist, formalist, feminist, legalistic, sociological and a host of others. However, this essay tilts heavily towards sociological criticism. Here, the critic examines in great detail the monumental corruption, unprecedented moral decadence and widespread prostitution that engulf the individuals and the state in the two works under discussion. There is the generation gap war between the children and their parents and the youths' perception of leadership and that of the adults. There is the bitter acrimony the former holds for the latter, which results in the former's stiff opposition and contemptuous jettisoning of their parents' values. They vehemently reject their parents' values and this has made parenthood in this century an up-to-the-hill task. The introduction is the background to the work with the family and societal values, which have been negated and uprooted by the parents. The parents' new values are repulsive to their children and they irresistibly strive to do away with their parents' immoral values and establish their own. On the other hand, the children's are very

repugnant to the parents. Besides, the two novels are set in Nigeria, and the nation is seen as a beautiful bride, which has been repeatedly raped, brutally hacked and heartlessly left to bleed to death by its leaders. The novelists believe that there is no difference between the female characters that are prostitutes and the nation; hence, both of them are subjected to constant rape by devilish, and vampire-lovers

3.1 Our Endangered Values

Every society, no matter how primitive or barbaric the others may think it is, has its own set of values with which individuals and groups co-exist harmoniously with each other. African societies before the adventure of the Europeans into them had their own traditions or customs with which they interacted. They had their set of rules, which was largely unwritten but encoded immemorially in the minds of the people. For example, in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe showed that his people did not first hear of the judicial legal system from the British. There was already entrenched a justice system as evidenced in the trial of the dispute between Uzowulu and his wife. The *egwugwu* or the masquerades, which were regarded as the spirit of the departed ancestors served as the highest appellate court or arbitrators in a dispute, whether matrimonial or land dispute. The same novelist showed that humanitarian war had been in Igboland prior to the coming of the white invaders. The people of

Umuofia decided that they could invade Mbaino and overrun them with their famous men of war, because of the conspiratorial action of a few of them in the killing of one of their daughters. Umuofia could not fight an unjust war, therefore, they had to send an emissary in the person of their greatest warrior, Okonkwo, to give them two options: compensation and pacification of the aggrieved Umuofia with a maiden and a lad. Mbaino knew that it was wrong to kill an innocent woman and chose the lesser evil, giving Umuofia a maiden to replace the murdered wife of the man of Umuofia and Ikemefuna.

Even when two clans were waging wars, there were unwritten codes, which must be obeyed. The people killed in the warfare were men and not women and children as exemplified in the heartless wars being fought all over the world today. Okonkwo was considered a warrior and a great man because he had several heads of warriors to his credit, and, whenever occasions demanded he used their skulls to drink palm wine. Besides, there were certain market days that were observed as a period of truce so that the men in the battlefields could replenish their stock and engage in other things that did not have to do with the warfare.

It is also a falsification of fact that the black man is without any system of governance. Like it had been stated before, each society, has a system that is adequate to its needs, no matter how negatively others outside the society may view it. Achebe portrayed, for instance, that

the Igbo people had a democratic system of governance. They didn't have a central figure like the president or governor or *emir* or *ooni* or *oba* prior to the white man's foray into the hinterland of Nigeria; yet, they still administered themselves. For a decision that was very important, like waging wars against other clans, all adult male members of the clan were summoned to a meeting or series of meetings and each had a right to talk and be heard. All the options available were explored in such a democratic system. Also among the highest in the democratic system of governance is the privileged titled men, who must have achieved distinction not in terms of ill-gotten wealth, but wealth based on dint of hand labour as evidenced in the largeness of one's family; the size of his compound and barns; the number of titles he had taken for himself and for his children; the number of children and wives he had; his expertise in one profession or the other considered to be valuable to the society; his contributions to the defence of the clan or in the waging of punitive wars against erring neighbours.

Age was respected but not worshipped. The elders were seen as the repositories of knowledge of the customs and traditions of the society. And that's why Okonkwo erred in not heeding the advice of one of the oldest men of Umuofia to desist from killing Ikemefuna for he called him "father". His killing of Ikemefuna disenchanting Nwoye and served as a catalyst to his rebellion and rejection of his father and what he stood for. Okonkwo's bitterness and

hatred of the white intruder and the killing of one of his agents, the court messenger, was not only to settle a fresh personal score – his humiliation with other five elders by the white man but also to settle a long standing grudge – the desertion of Nwoye to join the Christians.

One cannot also forget to mention the importance of the visit of the titled men of Umuaro to Ezeulu's compound to persuade him to eat the remaining yams and announce the day for the harvest. His rejection of their well-intentioned advice was to settle a personal vendetta and this later led to the defection of some of the people and his son's death. The *Arrow of God* ended in a tragic note – the high priest of Ulu, who in his hey days was the most revered man in Umuaro became a maniac, which his society considered worse than death.

The importance of the age grades cannot also be overstressed. These were indispensable in the administration of the society. The young men's age grades were particularly important, where sanctions were imposed on any individual or group. If the defaulter failed to carry out the decision of the people, they were the enforcers of the collective decisions of the community. In Mbanta, it was presumably the young men that barred the Christian women from fetching water and quarrying sand from the village stream as a form of enforcing the penalty imposed on them. When Okonkwo committed manslaughter in his accidental killing of the sixteen year old son of Ezeulu, it was the men that demolished his house, compound walls

and burnt down his property as a way of pacifying the Earth goddess as the shedding of innocent blood, if not decreed by the gods and goddesses, was a serious crime that the offender must be punished for.

As these men conducted their meetings, and heard cases and decided on them, and carried out the various traditional occupations – farming, hunting, fishing, blacksmithing – they were guided by certain set down principles of moral uprightness and truthfulness. The elders of the land were the custodians of native laws and customs, untainted witnesses in boundary disputes between families, neighbours and communities, and they were expected to be men of integrity. The exalted and enviable position of the elders before colonialism was cherished because of the sacredness of their utterances.

Beyond the fact that one must tell one's kinsmen the home truth, it has to be observed that old men are not expected to participate in telling lies. Not that there is any group among the Igbo who are permitted or encouraged to tell lies. It is only to state that telling lies is viewed more seriously when it involves the old men, especially the eldest member of a community (Opata, 1998:87).

It is understandable why the society frowns at untruthfulness, particularly that of elders. This is because the younger ones look-up to them, and they learn whatever they will be in future from them. Therefore, if the elder has any moral blemish, he passes it on to the youth that emulate him.

Besides, the African traditional religion, prior to Christianity, had its own unwritten code of conduct or tenets and sanctions on its believers or worshippers. Each man had his own personal guardian angel or god. The head of the family kept the family god and symbols of departed male ancestors, his *ogu* and his *ofo* in the shrine in his compound. Each morning he offered prayers, sacrifices and poured out libation to them. It was, therefore, a silly assertion to say that Africans didn't have any knowledge of the Supreme Being before Western Missionary came with the Bible. In his early morning exhortations before his god, the African man pledges his innocence. In *Purple Hibiscus*, the naïve narrator's grandfather prays thus: 'Chineke, I have killed no one, I have taken no one's land, I have not committed adultery' (Adichie, 2004:168).

In this brief prayer, he declared his innocence against offences that were serious, and which if committed, threatened the corporate existence of the community and were grievous moral sins against his god and his conscience.

In a man's position, for example, as the chief priest or priest of any god or goddess, he is expected to be truthful. He occupied a fatherly position in the community and if he was called upon to testify in any dispute, his testimony must be a truthful one. Also a father was not expected to lie to his children, and that was why a man could swear by an oracle if there was any land dispute that his father told

him that the boundary of the land was here or there. On this basis, Ezeulu grieved over Nwaka's and his supporters' challenge of his position as the chief priest of Ulu and the power of his god over the people and the other deities in the whole of Umuaro, because he told the truth about the land in dispute to the white administrator. He reflected:

But could a man who held the holy staff of Ulu know that a thing was a lie and speak it? How could he fail to tell the story as he had heard it from his own father? Even the man, Wintabota, understood, though he came from a land no one knew. He had called Ezeulu the only witness of truth. That was what riled his enemies that the white men whose father or mother no one knew should come to tell them the truth they knew but hated to hear. It was an augury of the world's ruin (Achebe, 1964:7).

There was a closely-knit interaction between the people *interse* and the people and their gods. If a man felt that his personal god had failed him, he could discard it and get another. At the same time, if a community sincerely believed that their communal god was not serving them, they could decide to dispose of the erring god and replace it with another. But until that was done, the god or gods must be obeyed and his sanctions carried out. Thus, Okonkwo had to make sacrifices to appease the goddess

of the Earth for violating its sacred Week of Peace when he beat his youngest wife, Ojiugo.

Furthermore, the parents worked hand in hand in bringing up their children. The girls were under the tutelage of their mothers, who taught them their roles as expected from their society. The men, on the other hand, brought up the boys. There was no question of one's abdication of one's responsibility to the family as this would be viewed as a very serious misdeed. Hence, Okonkwo taught Ikemefuna and Nwoye how to plant masculine crops like yam seedlings, how to tap palm wine, how to mend the compound walls, and he told them masculine stories of wars, violence and bloodshed because as boys, they were expected to grow up, fend for their families and defend their families and clans against external aggression. Because Okonkwo monitored the training of Nwoye, he was able to detect the growing effeminacy in the young man. He sadly and distastefully complained to his bosom friend about Nwoye's incipient laziness:

Nwoye is old enough to impregnate a woman. At his age I was already fending for myself. No, my friend, he is not too young. A chick that will grow into a cock can be spotted the very day it hatches. I have done my best to make Nwoye grow into a man, but there is too much of his mother in him (Achebe, 1958:46).

In the training of the children in the past, particularly the boys, no African societies had been known to alienate the children since they were the people that would transmit the societal norms and values from generation to generation. They were not excluded in watching the settlement of disputes in the village arenas or denied representation in the governance of the community. For example, Okonkwo allowed his sons to take his seat and carry his bag to meetings. The minors might not participate in their deliberations, but from listening to the words of wisdom from their elders, they invariably grew up to be wise men. At times, the children were called and told the stories of the founding of the clan, the heroic deeds of their warriors in inter and intra tribal wars and stories of their gods. A Nigerian novelist recounted this ancient practice of bringing up children to be useful and responsible members of the society through qualitative informal education:

Umuga had a rich history, full of heroism. A knowledge of the past was not lost on its people. From the early stage in their lives when children were eager to listen to stories with undivided attention, the family historian, the story-teller and the custodian of tradition began to gather the young ones together and teach them our ways. There was a multitude of things every child needed to know in order to have a deep understanding of

our past achievements as well as our failures. Every child was brought up to understand life as it was lived in the community and to have a clear awareness of future hope and aspirations. To accomplish this task, the teaching voice knew how to extract truths from our myths, our history and folklore so that the youths could be properly instructed (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 1996:1-2).

3.2 The Westernization of Africa

The colonial activities in all the nooks and crannies of Africa did not stop at the unprecedented economic exploitation of the continent. It was believed that no other race had suffered so much enslavement and erosion of and pillaging of its natural resources and cultural values as Africa. Though decades have gone by since Westerners packed their bag and baggage and handed over the governance of Africa to Africans, what is obtainable in the governance of every country in the continent is the Biblical situation of Esau and Jacob. Africans are said to be managers of their own affairs, but the real managers and bosses are the ex-colonial masters. The Westerners achieved this feat by smartly handing over the leadership of each country to their black stooges and these show their indebtedness and gratitude to their masters by allowing them substantial holding in the affairs of the continent. Soyinka sees the business arrangement in which Africans are battered and milked in this manner:

A conspiracy of power – besotted exploiters across national boundaries, bargaining with outsiders against **us**. Lip-service to revolutionary movements to drown the cries of internal repression. Tell me... what are they selling? All this haggling and under the counter deals, what is the commodity? **Us!** (1965:104).

The role of the writer in his society enunciated by Achebe was not lost on African writers. They were not unaware of the growing disillusionment of their people with the new leadership within the continent and they didn't keep quiet at the growing chasm between the rich and the poor, the growing line of dispossessed in the newly emergent African states, and the other acts of injustice and abuse heaped on the poor, the weak and the minority. The post-independent African writers like Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Ayi Kwei Armah, Chimalum Nwankwo and Gabriel Okara raised their voices against the monumental corruption, moral decadence and the impenetrable darkness of violence that threatened to envelop and emasculate the newly independent states. They resolutely raised their resilient voices against these societal ills:

Writers attack and protest often out of anguish and alienation, hence the phase is also a phase of satires. The roots of the protest and attacks are deeply embedded in the neo-colonialism imposed

on Africa by her own sons, the new rulers. The main thematic preoccupation of artists are the portrayal of injustice, widespread social evils and tensions, and the demand of accountability from the new rulers (Ogu, 1986:119).

Apart from economic exploitation of Africa and the imposition of corrupt and insensitive political leaders whose style of leadership led to innumerable coups and counter coups within the continent, there was the introduction of Western – type of education that alienated the children from their parents and their societies, turned them into materialistic individuals who despised the traditional values of brotherhood and good neighbourliness, exposed them to negative and dangerous mode of Western entertainment, and generally set the stage for the rat-race that traumatized and alienated the individual in the society. A critic writes:

Before then, at a time when the black race strove to gain recognition and identity, Achebe, as an Africanist, made his natural space of action the entire black world, using Nigeria to illustrate the crises of colonialism and cultural conflict, which was tearing down the social cohesion of black societies everywhere, emptying Africans of their human essence and force, feeding them with alien notions and values, unfamiliar ideologies and concepts

designed to make them people in 'exile' on their land and to themselves (Okoli, Ibadan: 2005).

The modern African has abandoned the cultural values of his progenitors – moral uprightness, truthfulness, egalitarianism, good and exemplary leadership. He has acquired the Western values of individualism, materialism and selfish political system with which he acquires power, either by hook or by crook or through the barrels of the gun. He now lives in perpetual fear in a violent society in which he kills or he is killed. A society that is replete with mine fields and explosive bombs which Ebele Eko envisions thus:

When a field of greed
Is sown with seeds of discord
And watered in strife
A harvest of hate
Is sure to come
When a man
Robs a man
His birthright and peace
He lights a fire
That slowly leaks
To a powder keg (2005:133-134).

In the two novels - *Our Children are Coming!* and *The Noble Mistress* – under study, the Nigerian youths have

been brought up under these values but they strive to reject them, thereby setting up a generation gap war between them and the adults in their lives. As the adults are determined to impose their monstrous values on their children, they strenuously are determined to jettison them in order to save the families and invariably the society from imminent collapse. They recreate the discarded African traditional values in which they intend to bring up their own children to grow-up into full-fledged human beings who are fully integrated in their society. For it is believed that:

Speculatively, one would suppose that in a high degree of permissiveness and egalitarianism within the family would be more likely to produce individuals who could not adjust easily to a repressive political system, or would not create such a system (Goode, 1972:21).

3.3 The Challenges of Parenthood

Parenthood has never been an easy thing from time immemorial. Even in the idyllic African society portrayed in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, for example, one could notice the current of tension between Okonkwo and his son, Nwoye, even when the coming of the white man still sounded as an outlandish and bogus story to the people of Umuofia. Okonkwo from mere hard work raised himself and his family from the life of squalor and shame, which

his father, Unoka, left them. However, his son was not as industrious as his father, Okonkwo, and that caused some mild friction between them. Okonkwo loved the stories of war, violence, and bloodshed, which his culture recognized as proofs of manliness. He did not see anything wrong with his killing of Ikemefuna, after all, the goddess decreed he must be sacrificed to appease the gods for the holocaust that the locust could cause. Also there was nothing wrong with the throwing of the twins into the evil forest. His father being taken alive to the evil forest for he had a swollen stomach could not raise his eyebrows. He did not see anything wrong that he should go to exile from his fatherland for seven years and his property destroyed for accidentally killing somebody. However, Nwoye and Obierika saw the deficiencies in some of those customs and felt that they should be overhauled or amended.

Towards the end of the twentieth century into the twenty-first, the generation gap war has intensified so much that Nigerian literary artists dealt with it in their literary works. Chukwuemeka Ike's *Our Children Are Coming!* and Bode Osaniyn's *The Noble Mistress*, the two novels set in urban cities in Nigeria show the generation gap crises or battle which the youth and their parents on one hand and the youth and leaders of the country on the other hand are engaged in. The parents believe that there are unwholesome traits in their children that make their role as parents an onerous task. Meanwhile, the youths believe genuinely that they are what they are today

because of the type of role models the adult society provided for them; however, they believe in blending both the positive sides of traditional African and Western values to train the younger generation of Nigerian children. They are of the opinion that their parents' blind acceptance of Western civilization and their throwing into the trashcan their own indigenous way has turned their children and the society into what they are today. Theirs and their parents' perception of leadership, at the family and state levels, is very much different and also in conflict. And this will be examined subsequently in this essay.

3.4 Leadership at the Family level

From the title of this work that ends with an exclamation mark, which indicates a tone of surprise, the novelist takes the reader through the conflicts between parents and their adolescent children. Dr. Chinwuba says: "Today, parents are born to serve their children, for as long as the parents live!" (Ike, 2004:2) Also in Bode Osanyin's *The Noble Mistress*, the narrator, Jojolo, has the same impression in her role as a single parent to her mulatto daughter;

Much as I did not like her to suffer in life, I would have loved her to experience some suffering if only for a spell of time, if only to teach her some hard lessons about life. But it seemed her very star shunned any form of suffering or even the slightest

discomfort. From one great enjoyment she glided into another. When she had to suffer it was I who did the suffering for her, I was her donkey, I was her scapegoat (2000:221).

In Chukwuemeka Ike's novel, the problem of youth has reached an alarming dimension that the president of the country has set up a Presidential Committee on Juveniles Below Twenty-one Years headed by a judge with other four people as members of the commission. In the presentation of the parents that appear before the commission, they have the following allegations against their children – sexual immorality, lack of motivation, laziness, indiscipline and selfishness.

The presentations of the first and second parents disclose that the youth of today – both boys and girls - indulge in premarital sex without qualms. The first parent, Chief Ayodele Olabisi, tells the committee how he has spent a lot of money in training his only son abroad from when he is a young boy. He buys a house in London where he lives, pays huge school fees, engages butlers to serve him just to make sure he gets the best education but he is unable to do that because of his addiction to drugs and women. He points out the sexual escapades of the son, which is like Don Juan's in Lord Byron's *Don Juan*. His adolescent son fails his examinations in England because he goes out with a white girl whom he puts in the family way. When he brings him back to Nigeria to retake them,

he has a fatal accident with his newest vehicle, a Mercedes Benz car, while cruising with a girl and the stroke that breaks the camel's back is that he cannot come back to Nigeria because there is a sex scandal between him and a Nigerian governor's wife.

In the presentation of Archdeacon Jeremiah Chukwukadibia Obi, the second parent to appear before the commission, the reverend gentleman confides in the members that one of his daughters is highly sexually promiscuous. She is an undergraduate who frequents hotels and chalets and embarks on frequent overseas travels with rich and powerful men in the country, who shower her with expensive gifts and plenty of money.

Also in Osanyin's literary work, Jojolo is a prostitute who wishes her daughter is not defiled at a very tender age. She is very angry with her when she allows herself to be lapped by one of her lovers, Dr. Oluwadi.

But from the presentations of these adults and as the reader goes through the works, he notices that the adults are implicated in the sexual frivolities of the youth. Jojolo at sixteen years drops out of school after Chief Raji rapes her with the conspiratorial connivance of her class teacher, Mr. Alonge. Tosheju, Jojolo's daughter, lives in one room with her mother and watches her sexual activities from infancy to adolescence. Also Ayo Olabisi Junior cannot be blamed as he is brought up in a polygamous family with all the intrigues and rivalries in the family as Jojolo. The sexual partners of these adolescent

men and women are adults: the governor's wife, Chief Raji and the rich men that go out with Jojolo and Apolonia. The chairman of the panel is one of Apolonia's lovers and he is old enough to be her father.

The presentations in the National Association of Students' Commission for Parents Over Twenty-one Years also implicate the adults in the sexual promiscuity of the youths. The testimonies of 001 and 002 show that their parents are irresponsible men; 001 is aggrieved with her father for his intransigence in not allowing her to marry her boy friend she is pregnant for. The boy's father is also irresponsible. The two men sit on their children's future happiness because they each want to settle a long – standing grudge between them over a white nursing sister. 002 in his presentation points out that his own father is a charming man that has a lot of national and international recognitions and awards. The young man testifies that his father is not only a ritual murderer but also as he reveals:

The eight days the girl was mysteriously absent from her school, she was ministering to the insatiable needs of 002's father, then on an official tour of three European countries. For, unknown to his family, or at least his children, each time the great man traveled within or outside the country, his entourage included one 'protocol officer', handpicked by a trusted special assistant (2004:215).

In the words of Falase, the president of NAS, the kettle cannot probe the pot since both of them are black. The students refuse to be probed by the Presidential Commission without representation. How can adults who are also guilty of the same offence probe their sexual immorality? The chairman, who wears a pious mien as a judge and a member of a Celestial church, sits in judgement over them, when he has a great appetite for devouring young girls. Not only that he is Apolonia's lover and her father unwittingly and ironically comes to seek solution from him, he also attempts to rape a Philipino undergraduate assigned to him during his tour of European countries. Each and every member of the commission has a skeleton in his cupboard. Dr. Chu Nwoke neither enriches himself with public funds nor defiles the members of NAS, except a one night affair with a student he calls 'Streetlight'. However, he has an unsatiable love for married women. Chief (Mrs.) Edo, the only female member of the commission, is a woman who pretends to being honourable. But she would not have gotten her M.Ed without her sexual relationship with the head of her department. This is a sophisticated and an educated woman who sleeps with all the male members of the commission and she pretends to each of them that he is the only man in her life, apart from her husband. Alhaji Adamu tells Dr. Chu Nwoke:

Who's talking of propriety? Alhaji Adamu asked. Why do you think women are injected into such commissions? In case you think you are the fastest guy around, the chairman and I explored her even before we left Victoria Island (2004:171-172).

The same sexual immorality dots the pages of *The Noble Mistress*. Men patronize Jojolo and her colleagues. In the business of prostitution, Jojolo says: "If my father had one sin, it was women. He had five wives. My mother was the fifth" (2000:17). As Honourable Momoh ogles at her in the presence of his girlfriend, Amina, she thinks: "Some men are not decent" (199). The men patronize the prostitutes in their hovel even in the nights of curfews. Gbabe bids Jojolo's father farewell with this business proposal:

We can still talk business. My hut is over there. If you need me, come to me. With each passing minute, the queue is getting longer and longer in the front of my door. Cheers, old daddy (2000:14).

These prostitutes, who are snubbed, are kept and patronized by rich, educated, powerful and seemingly decent men in society. Their patrons cut across racial, religious and international boundaries that Jojolo refers to her body as "United Nations". The politicians and educated men keep them as their mistresses and soldiers rape them.

But the highest point of immorality is seen among the upper class in society. At Paradise Club, single ladies, whether working class ladies or prostitutes are not allowed inside without being chaperoned either by their pimps or boy friends or husbands or any man at all. At the state banquet, there is a standing order that single women are barred from entry. Jojolo forms this opinion at the state ball where the men and women that make news in the country rub shoulders and make pretence to honour:

There was a standing order: 'an unaccompanied lady is prohibited'. This meant in a layman's language, no housewife, lady, girl, woman or mistress was to be allowed to enter the banquet without being accompanied by her husband, man, acquaintance, borrowed husband or sugar daddy. And since there was no limitation on what number of wives or mistresses any honourable member of the House could have, the order was thereby made flexible. For now, Amina and my humble self belonged to Honourable Momoh. We were his women (2000:200).

Once the lady is escorted into the exclusive club or the state ball, she can dump her male escort for a brisk business. Inside the rendezvous for the rich, there is no longer any distinction between a prostitute and a working class lady. Jojolo wins the crown as the best lady dancer at

the Paradise Club. She is also invited to the high table as 'Lady Jojolo' to support the chairman of the occasion at the state banquet.

Another reason for friction between parents and their adolescent children is that each of them accuses the other of selfishness. In *Our Children are Coming!* almost every parent that appears before the commission believes that the young ones are selfish and self-conceited. Chief Ayodele Olabisi believes that after all he has done to raise his errant son, he has repaid him with a bad coin. He moans, "My Lord, I haven't come to you to tell me where I have gone wrong, what haven't I done for this boy, what haven't I provided for him? Is this how God chooses to reward me for the hard work that went into every kobo I have made?" (2004:16)

In Dr. Yough's presentation to the commission, he points out that today's youths are not only pathologically lazy, but they are also inconsiderate and selfish. He says that from his own personal experience with his adolescent children that they can neither do any household chores nor wash cars and their dresses. They will rather glue their eyes to the television or other forms of entertainment while hired servants or their parents do the chores for them. They are either lazy to work or they feel that such jobs are too menial for them to do as children from the upper class in the society. This attitude is not confined to his children alone as he has noticed the same attitude in the minister's daughter. He finally tells them the story of a

widow whose daughter refuses to sell five cartons of beer to a customer because the maid is absent to carry the drinks and the empty cartons.

In *The Noble Mistress* too, Jojolo, as a single parent feels that her daughter, Tosheju, is inappreciative of all her effort to ensure she eats the best food, wears the best clothes, goes to the best schools, and provides her with substitute fathers. In order to achieve this feat, she descends to the level of Auntie Rose who carries every man that comes her way. At thirty-nine, she feels old; her breasts are sagging; her face is wrinkled; her eyes have some bags under them, and she is beginning to feel, 'body pain' like Auntie Rose and Angelina. She describes her profession as being strenuous as that of a 'wood cutter' or a 'labourer'. She slaves for the daughter and when the latter gets her scholarship funds, she spends the money without telling her. And when she arranges an Itsekiri youth to come to their monthly party, secretly thinking that his relationship with Tosheju may end up in a marriage, she dumps all the assignments on Omitu. The highest point of Tosheju's selfishness and self-centeredness is seen in the mother's reflection:

Sinking very fast into ruins, I was losing the control of my affairs, also losing my beauty, which was my greatest asset and my staff of office. Business was poor and risks were high. It was looking like I was going to end up in penury. I barely managed to

settle the education bills of Tosheju and was barely able to buy some decent clothes to cover my nakedness. Tosheju did not care very much, perhaps she did Not know that I was going down the drain. I was bankrupt: materially and spiritually. I could hardly feed. But I kept on struggling, struggling hard to make ends meet if only for the sake of Tosheju.... Egg-eaters, they say, never give credit to the aching anus of the hatching hen – so it was with my consumer daughter (2000:236).

However, one observes that from reading in between the lines of these parents' presentations at the commission, the parents contribute more than seventy per cent in their adolescent children's laziness. Chief Ayodele Olabisi, and Dr. Yough and Jojolo cannot be heard to complain that their children are lazy and selfish since they have deliberately taken the onerous task of paying for everything their children request, without trying to make them self-reliant and to appreciate that they (the parents) sweat to provide all the goodies for them.

Besides, in the presentation of the youths before NAS Commission headed by its sole commissioner, Chief Dipo Taiwo, the young men and women that appeared before it made it crystal clear that their parents are the ones that are selfish, possessive and intransigent. From the testimony of 001, her father abandons his white American mother abroad, and kidnaps her to be brought up by his

sister in England. He is a man who has a grown up son from a woman outside his marriage, a man who quarrels with a school mate and a professional colleague over a white woman, a man who indulges in charms and witchcraft; he is not only selfish and intransigent in his refusal of her marrying her heartthrob. She also felt he was not morally upright to sit in judgment over her. *In Everything Good Will Come*, Enitan is shocked to find out from outsiders that her father whom she considers an upright man and a disciplinarian has four children outside his family. She narrates broken-heartedly:

I waited for him that afternoon. My head felt like a shaken jar. Each time I opened it up, I didn't know which emotion to pull out. It wasn't uncommon for married men, especially of his generation, to have children outside. But this lying? Lying for years? I recalled how he punished me for lying as a child, how he would not forgive me for sneaking out with Sheri. It wasn't her – it was him I couldn't trust (Atta, 2005:154-155).

The presentations of 005 and 012 also show that parents are very selfish and possessive. They indulge their fancies, dreams, hopes and deprivations on their children. 005 testifies that her parents who wanted to be medical doctors in their youth but failed had to manipulate her choice of course, her university and the country she must

study. Her mother, frantically tries to arrange a marriage with somebody from her ethnic group. She is very frustrated with the brick walls of adult gangsterism that she takes solace in drug addiction until her friends take her to a psychiatric hospital, where she is rehabilitated. 002 says he is the only child of his parents; they shower him with expensive gifts, and suffocate him with a lot of attention that he is ridiculed by his mates. Also in the testimony of 006 he says that he is grateful to his parents for teaching him how to survive in a country where honesty is despised and honest people remain poor. His parents do all in their power to get him certificates and jobs that he does not merit. Parents, therefore, cannot say that their children are lazy if they are truly the architects of their laziness.

Also in *The Noble Mistress*, Jojolo accuses the daughter of being selfish, self-conceited and overbearing. As the girl elopes with Moses as the story nears its end, an unwary reader may tend to subscribe to the mother's description of her if she does not take into consideration the circumstances of her birth and upbringing. Tosheju is a mulatto, born by a prostitute for a sailor, who abandons her and the unborn baby in a hotel room and never returns to see or claim the child. She grows up either in a slum or a flat, attends one of the elitist schools in the country and mixes well with her teachers and classmates. However, she is still a child without identity as

fatherlessness confers a child with rootlessness. She is traumatized like little Hajjo that:

Although she did not know the circumstances surrounding her birth, one thing was clear to her: she could not boast of a normal family life ... At first she was not aware she was being treated differently, but as she grew older, it began to dawn on her slowly that she was an outsider in her own home (Alkali, 1986:8).

Tosheju as a growing up child needs the presence of a father and Mobolaji da Costa provides this for her briefly before he is jailed for corruptly enriching himself. He helps her with her schoolwork, plays with her, discusses with her, pays her school fees and buys things for her. Tosheju desperately needs a father and calls him 'daddy'. Her school mates and teachers really think he is the biological father. Alhaji Shinkafa marries her mother; Tosheju is already an adolescent and has come to secretly and quietly accept the fact that she is a bastard. She calls him her 'uncle', but that she has adjusted to the fact of her bastardry does not necessarily mean that she is unaware of the lacuna in her life. Her schoolmates will always ask her about her tribe and this simply means where is her root. They don't believe that Jojolo is her mother since they have already been made to believe that Mobolaji is the father. Therefore, two black people cannot bear a

mulatto. The mother naively thinks that single-parenthood is an easy thing. She believes that the material things she buys for her are enough compensation for lack of fatherhood. She does not consider the psychological trauma Tosheju goes through as she insists that the daughter is ashamed of her birth and her (mother's) lifestyle. Jojolo thinks that her substitute fathers are enough for her. But the reader notices as the narration progresses that nothing, neither landed assets nor *chose in action* from Mobolaji da Costa, comes to Tosheju. This would not have been the case if she were his biological daughter. Also the mother believes that Tosheju and her husband, Shinkafa, have taken to each other despite their arguments. But at the same time, she says that Shinkafa wants a child of his own from her. In other words, to the husband, Tosheju is another man's daughter and not his. Tosheju is described as a girl that made a first class at the medical school; therefore, there is the presumption that she is very intelligent. When the only possession she has, her mother, shocks her with her pregnancy, it dawns on her that it is high time she left the house since she could not afford to share her mother with anybody any longer. She stoically decides to call off the nonsense – elope with her heartthrob, probably marry him and settle down with a man that will provide her the identity she has sought throughout her childhood. The psychological and emotional trauma of lack of paternity for anybody is seen in this narration of a thirty-four year old Dr. Nwanneka

Ofoma, who said that none would be interested in the autobiographical work of an unknown consultant pediatrician:

“No !” I shrieked, tearing myself away from the impostor and running in search of my true mummy. I rammed into her in the dining room and shouted, “You are my mummy, Aunt Ukamaka is not my mummy”... “That, sir, is the answer to your question. That is how my early life, with the security of a home, a father, a mother, a brother, and a sister, was suddenly shattered. That’s how I came to learn of my fatherlessness” (Ike, 2001:5-6).

Moreover, Jojolo would not have lost Tosheju if not for her possessiveness and intransigency. Despite the fact that she has married, and is expecting a child, she does not want to let go of her daughter. She does not know any of the daughter’s friends who can help her persuade her to stay off Moses. She is not even aware of Moses’ presence in the daughter’s life until it is too late in the day to separate them. She is so unaccommodating and intransigent that Tosheju must marry a Nigerian. She does not bother to hear out or interview the two with some level-headedness that the situation requires. She does not know that Moses is an Afrikaner. As far as she is concerned, the daughter cannot go close to any white man because Klaus Meyer, Tosheju’s father, is a white man. In

fact, even when the couple elopes, she does not have any address where she can look for them.

Furthermore, the issue of untrustworthiness is a source of generation gap war between parents and their adolescent children. The presentation of Chief Ayodele Olabisi and Archdeacon Obi portray their children as not worthy to be trusted. While Ayo Junior is overseas gallivanting with women and gulping money from his wealthy father, the older man thinks that his son is serious with his studies in America; he is jolted by the newspaper report that his son is caught with a state governor's wife, "enjoying life in a hotel in Copacabana Beach, Rio de Janeiro" (2004:15). Also Apolonia gives her family the impression that she is in the university reading her books, while she globetrots with her numerous man-friends. Her father confides in the committee how she passes her courses in the university: "As for her professors, she knew the right time to offer them her body. She did not take money or presents from them. They gave her the excellent grades she brought back every year, even when she had no time to study' (2000:36-37).

The youths, on the other hand, are of the view that if they are dishonest or untrustworthy, the blame should be placed on their parents. Dr Bankole says: "A proverb makes the point that it is from the parent snake that the baby snake inherits its venom" (2004:327). In the presentations of the adolescent and the adults it is manifestly clear that their parents are not trustworthy.

Chief Ayodele Olabisi cannot claim to be a trustworthy father when he flees England with his precious son, abandoning the white girl he got pregnant to face the consequences of their action alone, when he bribes the police, the insurance company and the journalists to save his son and when, in his own words: "The governor who caught him with his wife wanted to bring him back here, to be tried and jailed, but after I had spent a lot of money on the matter he agreed to leave the boy alone" (2004:25).

He has also shown Ayo Junior that he is a dishonest father by lying to him that his own mother disappeared from the house and had not been traced since then. Unknown to the father, the wife had secretly established a link with her son.

Also Apolonia's father is not to be taken seriously though he pretends to be a man of honour. He stoops to take wholeheartedly, without any iota of doubt, and offer thanksgiving in his church, when his undergraduate daughter buys a brand new car for him, expensive gifts for every member of his household and also promises to build a house in their village.

The presentation of 001 also shows that the learned professors are dishonest men. The mulatto's father, though he pretends to be a disciplinarian and a moralist, is dishonest in abandoning her mother in England and fleeing with their daughter. He is also a man of straw when he gets a bastard son outside from a mistress and quarrels with the daughter's fiancé's father over a white lady. Also

002's father whom he believes to be a man of integrity shatters his perception of him when he discovers he is a ritual murderer and a chronic womanizer.

The adults in *The Noble Mistress* are also untrustworthy. Mr. Alonge betrays Jojolo's trust in him when he gives her out to the councillor to be sexually abused for his own gratification. Chief Raji sexually assaults a sixteen-year-old girl of her daughter's age. The raped girl describes the adult rapist and the rape with images of brutality and violence. She describes Chief Raji as a 'brute', 'a wild beast' the experience is a 'massacre', 'an ordeal' and 'an attack by a ferocious animal', and the bed she sees as a "slaughter house". Her experience is similar to that of Uduak who is raped by Father Tobias. She tells her husband: "I don't remember too much about him, but from the way he behaved that day, he's capable of doing anything. I told you, he was like a mad dog. It was so terrible that I couldn't say anything. If he's still the same person, then he's capable of doing anything" (Akpan, 2004:224). There is no difference between the traumatic experience of Jojolo in *The Noble Mistress* and Uduak in *Spiderweb* and Adanma in *Tales of Our Mother Land*. Adanma confesses to other Christian brethren at their fellowship:

I was forcefully disvirgined by a married man with six children; a man old enough to be my father, and for years I have hidden the vileness from my

parents and friends. But I am not alone. This Lucifer of a man has ruined and is still ruining many lives. You cannot escape his clutches if you are female and beautiful at the State Academy of Education and Strategic Studies We have by his hands, murdered many unborn babies. Many of us because of him may never in our lives know the Joys of motherhood (Emenyonu, 1999:69-70).

The offence of rape is usually played down in Nigeria. Where the victim suffers, people blame her for her experience and the rapist does not get the full weight of the law. This not only a form of torture and a genocidal crime calculated to humiliate the individual and the community, but in Nworojee and Reagan's opinion: "Rape – like murder, extermination, enslavement, deportation, imprisonment, torture, persecution on political, racial and religious grounds and other inhuman acts – is a crime against humanity" (2000 : 165).

In addition to the above, there is the issue of abandonment in *The Noble Mistress*, which is a sure sign of untrustworthiness. Jojolo's mother abandons her at the age of ten to either swim or sink in a polygamous family, of which she says: "I hardly understood the politics in the family" (2000:17). Her stepmothers also abandon her when Chief Raji raped her. Instead of blaming the adult rapist, she is blamed, and they tell her she is like her mother. The women's conspiracy and intrigues force her

out of her home into the street. She describes her situation in the home environment thus: 'I found myself an alien in my father's house. In my supposed home I was an outsider. As my mother was, so was I an alien. She found no home in a place where she thought was her home'(2000:36). When her father shadows her to Oko Biriki and tries to take her back home from her pimp's shanty, Jacknobody raises no brows. Klaus Meyer, the German boyfriend, who promises to marry her, surreptitiously leaves the shores of Nigeria, leaving her with a three-month old pregnancy.

The reader can rightly say, without prejudice to the parents, that their adolescent children are disenchanted with them as their role models. Their view of their parents is encapsulated in the NAS Commission's release:

... the surprising depth of moral depravity among parents, the double standards exhibited by such parents who expected their offspring to be angels; the abysmal lack of concern among adult society for the well being of the youth (2004:276).

3.5 Generational Gap Friction on Leadership

In *Our Children are Coming!* the adult and the youth do not see eye to eye on the issue of leadership at the societal level as in the home front. The first complains that the second is susceptible to indiscipline and unrest. But their indiscipline may be their legitimate demand that the

executive should redeem its campaign manifesto that corruption in all its ramifications should be eradicated, if it wins the election. The unrest may be the usual actions of the students in organizing demonstrations and riots against any government policies that are detrimental to their welfare. This is the reason why the government in power sets up the Presidential Commission on Juveniles Below Twenty-one Years, which has to submit its report to the president. This commission that probes the youths does not have any adolescent representation. And this sparks off a bloodless revolution in the country, championed by the youth to salvage the tottering giant from imminent collapse.

However, the legitimate demand from the youths under the umbrella of NAS for representation in the five-man commission serves as a valve that opens their hitherto bottled feeling on the adults' leadership of the country. They expose the moral and economic bankruptcy which the country has been reeling under in both civilian and military leadership. The theme of bad leadership in Africa has been one of the focal points in post-independent literary artists in all the three genres. The radical writer, Ayi Kwei Armah, describes the monstrous corruption and decay in post-independent Ghana with the symbol of impenetrable and tangible darkness. The Man feels: "Outside, the night was a dark tunnel so long that out in front and above there never could be any end to it, and so the man walking down it was plain that the lights

here and there illuminated nothing so strongly as they did the endless power of the night" (1968:47).

There is no doubt that the corruption and decadence is pervasive. It is not restricted to the cities and to politics; its tentacles have also tenaciously spread to the rural areas and religion. Emeka Nwabueze satirizes the situation where charlatans hijack religious power from the villagers. Ojumnaka who tries to checkmate the unbridled quest of the masquerader to the spiritual leadership of the clan deprecates him with this accusation:

I'm a poor man but I have earned everything I own. Everything you have was stolen from the national treasury. I' m poor because of people like you. We poor people suffer because of the likes of you. Now, you want to desecrate our only surviving culture because of your greed for wealth and power (2001:30).

The adult's rape of the country in their style of leadership is synonymous with the rape of the youths in the two novels. Some of the prostitutes in *The Nobel Mistress* are into prostitution out of necessity. Auntie Rose who is later beheaded sells her body when she feels she can no longer withstand the grinding poverty in the village where her mother toils day and night for endless years but cannot afford to provide meat for her family. And she carries every man that comes her way because she supports her

aged parents and four children. Despite her hazardous and arduous work, she cannot afford the luxury of eating very well. Jojolo also becomes a prostitute as a sign of rebellion against her family and society, after being raped by Chief Raji, when the court action instituted by the father ends in a nullity. The soldiers rape the women as part of their bounties of incessant military coups.

Also in *Our Children Are Coming!* the youths watch helplessly as ‘this country has been ruled as if it was the personal ranch of the privileged men and women with Western education, who constitute an infinitesimal fraction of the nations population’ (2004:137). The youths, therefore, are critical of the civilian administration, whose method of election into offices are marked with rigging and corrupt practices with dubious, too-good-to-be-true manifestoes. In their proposal contained in the ultimatum, they call on the executive and the legislature to dismantle political parties and general elections, which they view as the frameworks of corruption. Political parties, for example, are used not to mobilize people but are used by politicians to bribe their way into offices. The following conversation between three politicians will prove this NAS view that they are the bedrocks of corruption:

Ester: I prefer the NCP for the meantime.

Esam: Oh you won’t be with His Excellency.

Jude: (Jocularly) Let her be anywhere; she will come back home at the harvest time. (Anxiously) Now, tell me the fee for these processes, quickly.

Esam: A hundred and fifty million...

Jude: (Excitedly) Dollars or Naira?

Esam: (Smiling) Let's say naira. You see, with this, you are sure to be registered, we set campaign machinery on, see the party executives and use the rest for miscellaneous purposes. And I assure the next man at Aso Rock would be no less a man than Chief Jude Oscar (Yakoob, 2004:16).

In the two novels, the self-acclaimed messiahs, the military, are presented as another set of hoodlums that rape the country. It turns out that in the soldiers' greed to milk the country, there are incessant coups and countercoups, some of them bloody and others bloodless. Jojolo says that there are many of them that one lasts only six months. In fact, she does not bother to know the names of the heads of states because there are very many of them in quick succession. In Yekini Falase's view, which is the view of the narrator in *The Noble Mistress*, the administration of the khaki men are more brutal, more violent and more corrupt than the civilians.

Apart from how these adult leaders of society illegally and illegitimately acquire the power to run the country,

how do they appoint people into government offices? It is doubtless that the politicians and soldiers have no qualms in the appointment of these men and women. Merit is thrown to the wind and mediocrity is encouraged. The political class appoints people based on party loyalty. Those that help the elected members of the government to ascend into offices, those that are ready to help them perpetuate their stay, are the ones appointed to head government parastatals, university councils and boards of government-owned companies. Another group of beneficiaries of the politicians' largesse are their friends, relations, tribesmen, mistresses and those that are ready to share the booties they get from such appointments with their benefactors. Alhaji Adamu is appointed into the commission not because he is interested in the juvenile problems, but as a compensation for helping the president during his campaigns. Chief (Mrs.) Edo knows somebody who knows somebody in the corridors of power. Dr. Chu Nwoke has to share his monetary entitlements with his benefactor.

The soldiers don't owe any such allegiance to anybody, since they shoot themselves into power. Therefore, those who are ready to do their bidding, those who are ready to deal with their critics and opponents, those who will never ask questions in the prosecution of their assignments, and those who are generally without conscience are qualified to be appointed into tribunals. These tribunals have nothing to worry about from the

populace and the Nigerian courts since the decrees establishing them have already taken care of that. Stiff penalties are stipulated for violators of these decrees and the courts' power to inquire into the cases is ousted. In *The Noble Mistress*, Mobolaji da Costa is jailed for twenty-three years by a tribunal, where no lawyer is allowed to defend him and the courts cannot inquire into the merit of his case. His offence is that he corruptly enriched himself, which he would have gladly bribed himself out if it were a civilian government. And the chairman of the Presidential Commission, Justice Solomon O. Okpetun is impatient with bureaucratic bottlenecks under civilian governments. His style of chairmanship of the panel is dictatorial and leaves much to be desired. This is a man whose moral depravity is unimaginable; yet, he is appointed to probe the morality or otherwise of the juveniles. This is a man in whose puerile imagination:

The military had hardly withdrawn into the barracks before every Tom, Dick and Harry, including Professor Aliyu, began pouring vitriol on military rule. Mr. Justice Okpetun had sworn that he would deal mercilessly with any of such cowardly detractors who fell into his net. That was the least he could do to protect the men who had pulled him up from the slough of frustration to the respectability of the higher bench (2004:58).

The elected, the appointed and those that shot themselves into power are described as parasites, which bleed the country for their own pleasure. In the land blessed with natural resources, the populace lives in abject poverty in these novels. The poor of the city are dispossessed of their land at Oko Biriki, and New City thrown at them by the soldiers. The New City with its ironic name, Jojolo describes as a piece of “wasteland, sprawling, spreading, spreading like vegetation unkempt, unnurtured” (2000:18). The place is a habitat of dangerous and hardened criminals. Jojolo describes the occupants of the city for Tosheju:

Apart from armed robbers raging streets and lanes, there are kidnappers, ritual murderers, rapists and assailants who will not let innocent souls like you move about in peace. Ours is a sick society” (2000:189).

The adult leaders in Nigeria abuse their offices and positions to enrich themselves. For example, apart from the government spending a whopping sum of money for the five-man Presidential Commission, they are scheduled to travel to several countries of the world for their personal gains. 002’s father uses government funds to pay the ‘protocol officers,’ who are part of his entourage, each time he travels inside or outside the country. In *The Noble Mistress*, Jojolo says Honourable Momoh is a man, who four years ago, was a riff-raff lawyer. But now to call him a

millionaire is an insult because he has acquired a lot of money by virtue of his position in the civilian administration. In Alhaji Shinkafa's opinion, the once prosperous country has been reduced to a beggarly nation: left bankrupt and liquidated. The youths are relentless in their determination to revolutionize the country in *Our Children Are Coming!* The shameful leadership of the adult society is seen in Dipo Taiwo's reflection:

First, in the hand of politicians: lawyers, medical doctors, engineers, teachers, including university dons, business executives, and journalists. The cream of the society. Yet they unabashedly looted the treasury, raped the constitution and drove the country to the edge of the precipice. Then came the military men, claiming to be what they are not. Millions of defenseless civilians lost their lives and or material possessions, in a civil war precipitated by the inability of the military men to see eye to eye. Having made their pile, the military withdrew while their heads were still on their necks, and handed the baton to a new group of politicians. Corruption and moral depravity became enthroned as a virtue, and each new regime, regardless of their initial holier – than – thou proclamations, ended up more corrupt than its predecessor (2004:237).

This observation by an adult, and a fearless advocate of universal human rights, makes it glaringly clear why the youths are disgruntled with the leadership of the adult. NAS, under the leadership of Yekini Falase, claims that all the projects and policies formulated by every government in the country have been calculated to fail woefully. The Westernized educational system is calculated to alienate children from their parents and culture. 013 concludes his presentation at the NAS Commission by saying that the leaders of the country are hypocritical and selfish in their presumption that angels will come out of “the poultry-runs they have erected for us under the dignified names of secondary schools and universities” (2004:271). Also the NYSC, which the government implemented to foster discipline, patriotism and integration among the youth, Falase calls a slave labour, calculated to exploit the youths. The adults pay lip service to them as they act against the ideals for the establishment of the National Youths Service Corp programme as seen in the actions and utterances of 005’s and 008’s parents.

NAS insists that the Presidential Commission on Juveniles Below Twenty-one Years and National Moral Reorientation Commission, are unacceptable to the students. This is because the two commissions, like other similar ones – Code of Conduct Commission, Public Complaints Commission, Corrupt Practices Directorate – set up by various governments in the past, gulped millions of public funds, but never functioned, as the men and

women who set them up never intended them to work. In his reassessment of Badamosi Babanginda's and Sani Abacha's programmes, Better Life for Rural Dwellers and Family Support Programme, Christopher E. Ukhun observes that:

Rather than affect, in a positive sense, the quality of lives of the rural people, the two programmes were, instead, a source of disempowerment and frustration to women and men in rural Nigeria. The programmes were conduit pipes for the enrichment and glorification of the officials involved in the programmes at the three levels of government, namely, the Federal, state and local governments (2002:88).

In *The Noble Mistress*, Honourable Momoh, who symbolizes the moral and economic depravity that ravages the country, says of the youths: 'Little, rebellious children! They are now all over our present world. It seems the old and the new generations cannot harmonize' (2000: 244). There is no way the two can blend in a situation where the youths see the adults as termites sucking the nation's wealth, and the latter perceive the former as being restless and rebellious. Jojolo narrates of her experience at the state banquet, which is organized for the International Year of the Unemployed. There is so much to eat and to drink that there are leftovers. This is in a country where there are so many poor and so many unemployed. And

even when one, particularly a woman, goes out to look for a job, the employer demands sex from her before she is given any job. Jojolo, though needs a job and is a prostitute, but she rejects sex as a precondition for the offer of a job like Kareendi.

She enters another office. She finds out there another Mr. Boss. The smiles are the same, the questions are the same, the rendezvous is the same and the target is still Kareendi's tighs. The Modern Love Bar and Lodging has become the main employment bureaus for girls, and women's tighs are the tables on which contracts are signed Sister Kareendi, no man licks an empty hand. Take care of me, and I will take care of you. Modern problems are resolved with the aid of tighs. He who wishes to sleep is the one who is anxious to make the bed (Ngugi, 1982:19).

It is important to know that the issue of sexual immorality is not confined to Nigerian and Kenyan leaders. This is a prevalent problem in every African country. In the Somali-born novelist's work, *A Naked Needle*, Koschin, through whose stream of consciousness the artist mirrors the material and spiritual aridity in the country, gives two reasons why he decides to resign his job as a teacher. Apart from the school principal's indulgence in 'tribalistic instinct', he writes: "The Principal of the Institution in which I teach sleeps freely and publicly with the female students, who, in this way, are privileged in that whenever

one of them fails, I have to remark the exam in order to pass them" (Farah, 1976:16).

The raping of the youth and the country has created a palpable tension between the old and the new generations; each cannot see eye to eye with the other. The first feels it is its right to loot the national treasury while the second believes that it is its sacred duty to stop the looting.

3.6 The Handling of the Generation Gap War

The two novels show that the adolescent children are more mature in their handling of the generation gap friction – at the family and societal levels – than the adults. The adults' reactions to the youths' requests show them as being intransigent and high-handed. At times they resort to silence, bullying, conspiracy and bribery. NAS's simple request for inclusion into the Presidential Commission is met with its characteristic silence; it heads for the court and is frustrated. It sets up its Commission, which is calculated to expose and humiliate the adult society. When the commission is set up, the government thinks that bullying the students will yield a positive result, but this does not avail it as its ban on rallies and demonstrations, threat of expulsion of students, arrest of Yekini and Taiwo, the closure of the universities and other higher institutions, the proscription of NAS commission and the eviction of students from their hostels, do not

deter them from their avowed duty of saving the country from its rottenness.

Besides the youths feel that they have come of age: to hold the bull by the horn. Like Doctors Nwoke, Bankole and Chinwuba predicted, the youths are unpredictable and their unpredictably plays itself out in the course of the struggle between them and their parents and leaders. The usual reaction of students whenever their demands are not granted is to demonstrate. But, surprisingly, NAS under the leadership of Falase has matured. Instead of their usual method of registering their protests, it heads for the court, sets up its commission, which amazes the adult society. Also when the government bans rallies, NAS does not defy it but Falase travels to London and grants an interview to the English Broadcasting Corporation presenter, Victor Parker.

The same level of maturity is demonstrated by Tosheju in *The Noble Mistress*. Though Jojolo slaps her father as a teenager when he calls her a 'sewage,' a name that symbolizes her profession she detests so much, Tosheju does not raise her hand on Jojolo when she slaps her because she calls her 'a primitive' woman for her uncompromising and antagonistic attitude towards Moses. And instead of creating unnecessary tension when she informs her she is pregnant, she simply and quietly walks out of her life.

Moreover, all the parents who present their problems to the commission do not have any suggestions to make to

it, instead, they simply come to get solutions from the commission which has none to offer. Those who attempt to give suggestions are miles away from offering meaningful solutions because they have not appreciated their contributions to their adolescent children's problems. For example, Archdeacon Obi suggests that one way to stem out the tide of sexual immorality among students is to go back to the era of female excision and child-marriage. He is of the opinion that universities in the country should disallow their students coming into their hostels with expensive gift items. Alhaji Adamu's opinion on the solution to Apolonia's case is material. He says:

Come, come, madam! Alhaji: Adamu beckoned to Mrs Edo as he spoke. You 'll surely agree that the refusal by a girl's parents to accept the gift of a car on principle would make an indelible impression on any girl (2004:45-46).

Also Dr. Yough's suggestion on how to solve the pathological laziness, and self-conceitedness of youths as establishment of good boarding schools, where teachers will instill discipline in children to teach them self-reliance, shows he is miles away from the answer to these problems. Dr. Chu Nwoke tells him that the teaching of self-reliance must start from home and not school. The presence of hired servants who do the work in the house for the children will defy this noble ideal.

Nevertheless, only three people who appear before Justice Okpetun's Commission make meaningful suggestions – the widow, Dr. Abia and Dr. Bankole. The widow, despite the fact she lives in the rural area and is an illiterate, is aware that her son's problem is as a result of his being uprooted from his family and culture very early in life. However, she comes to the commission to see whether it can help her find and bring back her son. Also Doctors Abia's and Nwoke's erudite submissions on how to end youth-quake are arrogantly dismissed by the chairman on flimsy reasons. The parents who do not know the causes of their children's problems cannot accept the solutions, even when offered to them. Anyway, the committee is not interested in these problems and their solutions, because those that set it up are not interested in them either.

The reader notices that the youths, who testify at the NAS Commission, are cross-examined by its sole commissioner. And they have solutions to their problems because they are the ones that bear the brunt of the adult's decadence. 001, for example, suggests that if she becomes a parent, she has to establish a good relationship based on trust with her children that they can confide in her, if they have any problems, instead of her being a crises manager when the problems blow out of proportion. Also 012 is of the opinion that parents should try as much as possible to give their children some measure of independence for them to grow up properly.

005 advises the children that it is not every order their parents give them that they should obey. Falase and NAS have their own solutions to exorcise the country beleaguered with corruption and immorality.

However, the reader should note that only 006 does not have the chance to offer any suggestions. This is deliberately done by the novelist as it underscores the fact that the young man who is grateful to his parents for teaching him how to survive in a corrupt society is already corrupt and will not have any meaningful suggestions to make to facilitate the eradication of corruption as envisaged by the youths. Ike wants to show that corruption will still thrive in Nigeria as some of the youths have imbibed the culture and will not let go, despite the 'bloodless revolution', as 006 promises to do the same for his own children.

Furthermore, the adults who are not culpable for the corruption and moral decadence keep criminal silences to the plundering and pillaging of the nation's wealth. Chief Dipo Taiwo is determined to continue to work with NAS, even if he steps on the toes of parents, university authorities, and the government, because it is a way of redeeming himself from his silence in the face of the darkness that hangs over the country. Also Drs. Chinwuba and Bankole also blame themselves, however, as the novel ends, Bankole works with NAS to achieve the revolution and he intends to bring Dr. Chinwuba to join them.

Besides, the youths have been restless as they watch the depravity in the country. They need only a catalyst to jolt them into action, which their non-inconclusion into the Presidential Commission provides. From that point to the end of the novel, they are relentless in their action and utterances to rid the country of its malaise. Yekini Falase and other NAS members render a selfless service to the nation and Falase offers to pay the supreme sacrifice: death, if the need arises, in order to achieve the desired result. He stays in Kirikiri Maximum Prison for thirty-five days with Chief Dipo Taiwo. With their collective struggle and collective voice, they are saying to parents that unless you rediscover your role as parents, you will be irrelevant. And to the country's leaders, unless you turn to a new leaf, discover what it takes to be a leader – selfless service to the citizens – we shall try a bloodless revolution. But if this tactics fails, Shinkafa's prophecy that people's revolution is the ultimate revolt will be your fate. Jojolo says repeatedly in *The Noble Mistress*: "Such was the verdict of the people at that time. A few politicians got on the nerves of the people and the people set them ablaze." (2000:5)

In *Our Children are Coming!* this fate is not reserved for only politicians but also those top people with skeletons in their cupboards: depraved present and past leaders. For the populace, the youths have this message for it: because you live in a materialistic society as symbolized by Mr. Osinbilu's Consul, Chief Raji's

Ambassador, Honourable Momoh's American Limosine, Glass House and Oasis Supermarket, you will always be raped by the wolves and hyenas among you. As Basil Davidson puts it succinctly: "With clientelism now feeding voraciously on the fragility of states – states that could easily be overthrown or subverted by generals or colonels, and soon enough by sergeants and corporals – there seemed to be no limit to its ravages" (1992:102).

3.7 Conclusion

The adult society has jettisoned the positive traditional values of their forebears and acquired the Western ones. They have adopted the negative Westernized values in the training of their children. These children, having come of age, have heard and seen at home, at school and in the country their corrosiveness. While the adult die-hards cherish and cling to the values as being priceless, the malleable youths are willing and determined to shake them off as being repulsive and destructive. These likes and dislikes between the two compulsory composite parts of any population in a country have set in motion a deadly struggle. The youths, being fully aware of its causes, effects and solutions, unlike the adults, are ready to exploit these advantages to win the generation gap war between them and their parents, in order to re-establish an egalitarian and humane society as it was before the madness of Westernization overtook their parents.

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Chapter 4

Women's Cross-Cultural Burden in the Selected Works of Some West African Female Writers

4.0 Introduction

It is a trite statement that a work of art may be analyzed from different perspectives – historical, sociological, legalistic, feminist, Marxist and so on. However, an eclectic approach will be adopted in this essay in the critical examination of the recurrent themes of women's cross-cultural burden of motherhood, polygamy, abandonment and widowhood to find out whether they are self-imposed or culturally-imposed as feminists claimed in their literary texts. Finally, useful suggestions are offered on how women can unfetter their manacles.

Just as the early works of West African male writers – Chinua Achebe, Soyinka, Mongo Beti, Ferdinand Oyono and a host of others – are a revolt against the Western imperialists' assertion that Africans had no culture and no history before their civilizing mission, the works of West African female writers, ironically, are also a revolt against the male writers' negative portrayal of the African woman. They complain about the low image and marginalized role given to their female characters. She is either characterized as a mother or a witch or a whore or a housewife or a petty-trader. Such low image of the African woman can be seen in Cyprian Ekwensi's *Jagua Nana*.

Though the daughter of a catechist, she is presented as the epitome of vulgar sensuality and pornography with the undertone of moral decadence.

Jagua was fond of changing her clothes often, and in those early days of make-up, was fond of painting her face. Every few hours, she went down to the water-side and took off her clothes and swam in clean cool water. The boys used to hide and peep at her breasts and hips. She knew it and always teased them. All the girls in her age had married and had children but she insisted to the last, hoping even, for some prominent man to come along to Ogbu and marry her. To the shock of her villagers, she wears jeans and rode through the narrow alleys of Ogbu and talked loudly and her laughter was throaty so that men drew to her side and wanted her. She considered herself above the local boys, most of them whom she had bedded and despised as poor experience (1982:166).

They do not only protest against this type of disgusting image but also the marginalized role assigned to the female characters in their works. They are always at the fringes of their communities' activities and never part of the decision-making process, even when their interests are at stake. In fact, little is seen, heard and talked about them. They are either farming, fetching water or fire

wood; plaiting their hair, cleaning their private or public huts; washing cooking utensils; being beaten by their fathers, brother or husband; running away from the masquerades; going or coming back from the market; bearing or rearing children; or cooking food for their families or guests.

Obierika's compound was as busy as an anthill. Temporary cooking tripods were erected on every available space by bringing together three cooking blocks of sun-dried earth and making a fire in their midst. Cooking pots went up and down the tripods, and foo-foo was pounded in a hundred wooden mortars. Some of the women cooked the yams and the cassava, and some prepared vegetable soup (Achebe, 1958:78-79).

This is the typical picture of the African woman as presented by the men. Her socio-economic, political and cultural contributions to the life of her community are ignored. One of the early critics on African writers declares:

Women's contributions to the needs of the household is direct and indispensable... women are seldom to be seen taking part in the public life, being absorbed in their own tasks... The whole year round they have the monotonous task of fetching

water, searching for firewood, pounding grain and cooking (Pauline, 1963:6-7).

Even though the majority of the African women are still reeling under the burden of religions and customary practices, coupled with poverty and illiteracy, the few educated and emancipated ones take it as their avowed responsibility to strengthen and redeem the already shattered and battered image of the African woman. The writers and critics see it as a challenge and a mission to present a fair and unbiased picture of the African woman. They maintain that the over- bloated and deceptive old wives' tale that a woman's greatest achievement can be attained through marriage and motherhood are stereotyped and must be discarded. To them, the new woman that they project must be independent, resourceful, and determined. A critic puts the new image of the African woman succinctly:

The new woman will not succumb to the traditional norms that subjugate and relegate her to the background. She challenges accepted ideals of marriage and maternity, she chooses to work for a living or argues a feminist cause.... (Stephens, 1982:184).

In their works, female characters are assigned major role and the men are marginalized that they are barely noticed.

Looking at the character sketch of Nwapa's heroine, which is applicable in all feminist texts, a male critic observes:

No woman in Nwapa's novel is a parasite that depends on men for sustenance. If anything, in Idu, it is the man who has no inner resources, who borrows money constantly from the wife, who when the wife deserts him, "hanged himself from the thatched roof of his hut" (Nnolim, 1992:196).

Throughout the whole of sub-Saharan Africa, whenever the women pick up their pens to write, there are similar themes that run through their works. The recurrent themes of motherhood, polygamy, abandonment and widowhood are present in the selected works of the Nigerian-born Flora Nwapa's *One is Enough*, Buchi Emecheta's *Second Class Citizen*, Zaynab Alkali's *the Stillborn*, the Ghanaian-born E.T. Sutherland's *Edufa*, Ama Ata Aidoo's *The Dilemma of a Ghost* and the Senegalese-born Mariama Bâ's *So Long a Letter*.

Note that other works by these female writers and other authors, both male and female, are used where they are necessary for the proper elucidation of these cross-cultural burden of the West African woman.

Suggestions are also offered for the best way of integrating her through reorientation or socialization and legislation.

4.1 The Major Themes in these Selected Works

In every African culture, a girl's training from the cradle is geared towards marriage. If her character is bad, nobody deems it worthwhile marrying her. If her upbringing is sound or her parents are morally upright, she is either betrothed at birth or she marries in her early teens. An unmarried girl in her late teens is a source of embarrassment to her family and relations. Sule reminds Awa of her dreary routine in her father's house.

Look at you, eighteen years old, still at home, single. Not allowed to go out at all except to the market, the riverside, the prayer house and the school. Even then you are always watched. I tell you, if this continues, ten years from now you'll still be right here performing the same chores; fetching water and teaching a group of dirty children, not to talk of being bossed by a cruel headmaster at school and an irate father at home. The only difference will be, you will be ten years older and much more frustrated (Alkali, 1984: 3-4).

And J.P. Jordan claims that "a girl's life, therefore, was not accidentally but essentially a preparation for marriage. It was her one great object in life. If she failed in that, she was considered to have nullified her existence" (1971:210).

The West African man, on his part, has different reasons for marrying. He may marry because he wants somebody to cook his meals; help him in his farm; clean his house; wash his clothes; keep him company; but most importantly, he wants somebody to bear him children, especially sons that will replace him when he dies. To achieve this last purpose, the bride is expected to start having children within one year of coming into his house. Omirima poisons Efuru's mother-in-law's mind with this statement: '... it is a year since your son married. One year is enough for any woman to begin making one. Find out quickly and if she is barren start early to look for a black goat, because at night a black goat will be difficult to find. Besides there are other girls you will like to have as daughters-in-law' (Nwapa, 1966:139). Therefore, motherhood is the peak of a woman's achievement that Benjamin Spock notes, "Not only was a woman's entire happiness dependent on her civilizing task, her very identity was derived from it. A woman is nobody, a wife is everything and a mother is next to God" (1992:39).

Note that the West African woman's quest for children is not only confined to her culture. Research has shown that it is a universal desire, for Sarah Delamont writes:

Motherhood is popularly supposed to be women's natural destiny and at the same time the most honored and exalted role. Motherhood provides women with both personal satisfaction and social

approval, and satisfies their biological urges (1980: 196).

The difference between her and her counterpart in other cultures is that she has been deluded from childhood to believe that motherhood is the reason for her creation. In her society, barrenness is a curse. Name tags like 'he-woman, witch, mermaid, barren woman, devil' are given to those that cannot procreate. She is quite a disappointment to everybody that her existence is not noticed. She is also the cause of every calamity that falls on the family. Li's grand-father's thought of his barren wife is the typical life of humiliation which every barren woman goes through in every West African society. "'The witch', he thought. 'She is never happy until there is trouble in the family. Wicked, barren woman'. In Kaka's opinion, the woman had been the root of all his troubles and his son's too" (Alkali, 1984:25).

The modern scientific and technological breakthrough has not broken down the walls of superstitions that cage the African's mind. He still believes up until tomorrow that a woman is responsible for the making and determination of the sex of a baby. This may be because the period of gestation takes place in the woman and there is no change in the man that deposited the sperm. The patriarchal society also finds it inconceivable that a man may be sterile. Any infertility in any marriage must be the woman's fault. The women themselves have been brutally

conditioned to believe so. Without any medical examination, Efuru confides in Ajanupu, 'I want my husband to have children. I am barren' (Nwapa, 1966:180).

It is also not considered that incompatibility, drunkenness or making love at the wrong time of a woman's ovulation can also affect conception. Nnuego erroneously admits to Anatokwu: 'I am sure the fault is on my side. You do everything right. How can I face my father and tell him that I have failed' (Emecheta, 1980: 31).

It is beyond a mother's wildest imagination that her precious and beloved son is impotent. The source of any infertility must be from her daughter-in-law whom she subjects to incessant harassment and intimidation. Obiora's mother spits out her venom on Amaka for being the cause of her son's childlessness.

Let me take your point one by one. You said you saw a doctor, or about to see a doctor who could treat you and make you pregnant. I say you are a liar. All the doctors that you saw said that you were incapable of bearing a child. You were dishonest not to tell your husband that he was wasting his strength on you (Nwapa, 1981:13).

A barren woman is expected to marry another wife or wives for her husband. It is preferable that she does that because if she wastes time, two consequences may follow from that. He may either marry another woman with or

without her consent or he gets a concubine who will bear children for him. He has to take one of these measures to restore his piqued ego and prove his manhood.

For one thing, when Obiora told her that he had sons, she was not happy, but she was relieved. At least her husband was happy. People now knew that the fault was hers. It would be painful, this realization.... (Nwapa, 1981:28).

Also Efuru does not enjoy her husband's confidence despite her love and trust in him, despite her humility and hard work, despite the number of years they have been married, she is disappointed and humiliated that "... for years, Gilbert hid from her the fact that he had a baby boy by another woman. She was overwhelmed and gave way to uncontrollable tears" (Nwapa, 1966:209).

In the West African societies, a barren woman suffers a double jeopardy. When she is alive, she is neglected, relegated to the background, treated with scorn and seen as a waste. In the share of her husband's property if he predeceased her, nobody remembers her. She is valueless without a child. Hajia's husband informs her, 'I no longer have the strength to go out and work, and when I die, they will split my wealth over my corpse, like vultures over a carcass. They will not give you a brick because you have no child' (Alkali, 1984:73).

At death, she does not enjoy any respite. Her corpse is abhorred because she is a total failure in life. In some African societies, her corpse is mutilated as a sign of contempt.

A childless woman is regarded as a sort of monstrosity; indeed, it is not unknown that when such a woman dies, in order to express contempt in which she is held, her abdomen is slit across prior to her burial. She has failed to fulfill her function in life, and this mutilation of the corpse is a token of failure: her name is blotted out forever (Basden, 1966:213).

The value placed on children in the West African societies is very high that a barren woman is always in agony throughout her life. This is dramatized in *The Dilemma of a Ghost* where the 1st woman laments:

Oh, Eternal Mother Nature,
Queen Mother of Childbirth,
How was it you went past my house
Without a pause
Without a rest?
Mighty God, when shall the cry of an infant
Come into my ear;
For the sun has journeyed far
In my sky (Aidoo, 1980:18).

Note that a woman is not supposed to reveal her husband's sterility. However, if it is ever discovered, he will be the butt of his society's ribaldry. Manu's deserting wife exposes his impotence to the village elders who feel:

Without meaning to, they had stripped their clansman naked for all eyes to feast on. They knew what had transpired that day would spread like wildfire on harmattan grass. The next thing would be Manu's name in the village arena. He would be ridiculed in songs and would carry the shame of it to the grave (Alkali, 1984:54).

A woman ought to have many children, because they are regarded as a good investment. Also her position in the husband's family and her share in his property depend on the number of children, especially sons that she has for him. In some parts of Igbo land, the birth of several children or the birth of sons at a stretch is celebrated. Achebe tells of this cultural practice in one of his novels:

By the time Onwubiko died Ekwefi had become a bitter woman. Her husband's first wife had already had three sons, all strong and healthy. When she had born her third son in succession, Okonkwo had slaughtered a goat for her as was the custom (1958:56).

The system of inheritance in most societies makes it imperative that she ought to have children of a particular sex. If she is unlucky to have only a string of girls or only one son, her mind is not yet settled because her position in the man's house is shaky. It is also a disappointment for a baby-girl to be a woman's first fruit of the womb. Adah thinks about the priceless value of a male-child in her culture:

But how was she to tell this beautiful creature that in her society she could only be sure of the love of her husband and the loyalty of her parents-in-law by having and keeping alive as many children as possible, and though a girl may be counted as one child, to her people a boy was like four children put together? And if the family could give the boy a good university education, his mother would be given the status of a man in the tribe (Emecheta, 1974:68).

Formal education is the exclusive right of the boys and the family wealth is usually reserved for their training. But for a girl, 'a year or two would do, as long as she can write her name and count. Then she will learn how to sew' (Emecheta, 1974:9). Her education is seen as a waste of time and resources since men prefer marrying uneducated ones. This societal attitude compels Nnuego to believe that "one planned for boys and had sleepless nights over

boys, girls on the other hand were to help in running the house and could be disposed of as soon as possible, unless one was asking for trouble" (Emecheta, 1980:204)

The training regime for a boy that comes after many girls or is the only son of the mother or is born after many years of childlessness is usually defective. He is pampered that he grows up a spoilt child. No household chore is allotted to him. Such a person grows up to be lazy and is likely to abandon his responsibilities to his family later in life. Adah complained about the way the mother-in-law brought up Francis and his brothers, which made them to think that they were special superhuman creatures (Emecheta, 1974:108). Ajanupu tells Efuru's mother-in-law: 'You are the cause of your child's bad ways. You never scolded him because he was an only child. You delightfully spoilt him and failed to make him responsible. You failed to make him stand on his own so that now he leans on these rich women not because he loves them, but because they are rich' (Nwapa, 1966:80).

A woman can be forgiven her atrocities provided she has children. For illustration, adultery on the part of a married woman is a very serious offence in some places that she may be sent home if it is discovered. But if she has children this may be difficult. A male novelist says this of his Bantu tribe: "Once a married women had a child, all her caprices and infidelities are excused" (Betí, 1957:8). This is also applicable in Emecheta's culture where she

states through her heroine “a woman would be forgiven everything as long as she produced children” (1974:28).

Note that the feminists feel that the men are insensitive to the dangers faced by a pregnant woman. Adizua was sleeping when Ogonim was delivered. Gilbert was not in the house when Nkoyeni had her baby. A child-wife during labour may have the walls of her womb torn to shreds or she may even die at childbirth,

His thirteen-year-old bride, who had died in childbirth a few years ago, had been his father’s choice. The headmaster had cared a lot for the fragile girl. He had looked after her well when she was ill, thus earning his good reputation as the most loving husband in the village. Yet, whatever he had felt at the time, love or compassion for the child-bride, hadn’t prevented him from taking his pleasure elsewhere (Alkali, 1984:45-46).

Children are a woman’s diamonds that it is unheard of that one uses contraceptive methods to control birth. In the past, the natural method of abstinence was used. A man had up to ten wives and the breastfeeding ones amongst them could not sleep with their husband. In some communities, it is a taboo to sleep with a breastfeeding mother. In this modern age, the use of artificial method of birth control is still frowned at and unacceptable. Ato confided in his black American wife that his people ‘would

say we are displeasing the spirits of our dead ancestors and the Almighty God for controlling birth...' (Aidoo, 1965:42).

It is not an excuse that one is poor and cannot feed the number of children she had. It is also believed that a woman who is using contraceptive method to control birth is sleeping with other men, apart from her husband. Her age is not a good enough reason for her to control birth. The effect is that she can have children up to her old age.

Ekwueme's mother's last baby was a wonder to the villagers. Ekwueme was Adaku's first child. Nkechi, Ekwueme's sister, followed over ten years after. After her there was no more children for fifteen years or so. No one dreamt Adaku would have another child and when her belly started swelling again, everyone at first, including Adaku herself, thought she was diseased (Amadi, 1966:42).

Note that though children are a good asset, no parent wants her daughter to get pregnant outside marriage. This is because every decent society frowns at single parenthood. Ramatoulaye is dismayed by Aissatou's pregnancy and she queries. "Who is behind this theft, for there has been a theft? Who is behind this injury, for injury it is. Who has dared? Who?" (Bâ, 1980:82). When her daughter's lover visited the house, she noted the

physical and biological differences between a man and a woman.

Ibrahim Sall himself ran no risk of being expelled from the university. And even had he still been at school, who would inform the school of his position as father-to-be? There would be no change in him. He would remain 'flat' while my daughter's swollen belly would point an accusing finger (1980:85).

Parents are not much agitated when their son puts a girl in the family way. Kaka is displeased that his son disowned his grandson for getting the village blacksmith's daughter pregnant. He is very frantic: 'Cursed be me', he wailed, 'that I should live to see the day a male-child is disowned for proving his manhood' (Alkali, 1984:59).

4.2 Polygamy

The cultural novelists present a rosy side of polygamy where the head of the family fulfills his role to the various wives and their children; the women also know their positions and seniority is very much respected. In the past, a man's achievement and standing in his society can be seen by the number of wives he has: "He was still young but he had won fame as the greatest wrestler in the nine villages. He was a wealthy farmer and had two barns full of yams, and had just married his third wife" (Achebe, 1958:6).

In the agrarian communities, the women contribute in the running of the house by helping the man in the farm and petty trading to support their own branches of the family. He can control them by being fair and firm in the treatment of the various wives and their children. The women love themselves and their husband's other children from his different wives. A male novelist looks at the romantic side of polygamy in his society when there is love in the polygamous home:

This is when I saw my father's second wife make her appearance holding aloft an exercise-book and a fountain-pen. I must confess that this gave me no pleasure at all rather than encouraging me it somewhat embarrassed me, although I knew quite well that my second mother was merely observing an old custom, and doing so with the best will in the world, since the exercise-book and the fountain-pen were the symbols of a profession which, in her eyes, was superior to that of a farmer or a mechanic (Laye, 1954:97).

But another male novelist disagrees with this idealistic presentation of the theme. He depicts its ugly picture in a society that is in transition; a society overtaken by industrialization and urbanization; a society where polygamy is no longer fashionable because love in the various composite units has turned to hatred. He feels that

polygamy is not the pastime of a weak, lazy, and unfair-minded man. He vividly portrays the catastrophe that goes with polygamy where the man has lost control of the family. Ma Nwojide reacts to the death of all the members of his son's family. "What am I seeing?" she screamed as she stepped back in terror. She shook all the children one by one. Their bodies merely rolled back and forth in lifeless response" (Okpewho, 1970:90).

Although Okpewho paints a horrible picture of polygamy, there are criticisms against his presentation of the theme:

As in most male-authored texts which deal with polygamy, the stress is on the poverty which prevents the successful practice of this traditional system, rather than on the psychological experience of the situation and its effect on the lives of the women involved. However, there is a stress on the failure of the system to function effectively in the modern world, which sets these male-authored texts apart from the earlier nostalgic defences of the system (Gareth Griffiths, 2000:241-242).

The feminists contend that polygamy has failed in the modern day families because of the trauma experienced by the women and their children. Today's men have different notions of polygamy. Garba informs his friends, 'in the city you do not have to live together in the same

house. I have a friend who keeps four women in four different areas of the city. None of them knows the others exists and they all slave for him!’ (Alkali, 1984:45).

Things have fallen apart in every West African society with the coming of western civilization and culture. The men are not ready to live up to their responsibilities of being the breadwinners in many polygamous homes. They have to relax while their women sweat for them. There are also so much jealousies and competitions. The senior wives will like their rights to be recognized while the younger ones will deny the existence of such rights. There is also lack of accommodating spirits amongst them. And different women react differently to polygamy. There are those that accommodate their competitors. Efuru is ready to tolerate it and says:

I don’t object to his marrying a second wife, but I do object to being relegated to the background. I want to keep my position as the first wife for it is my right (Nwapa, 1966:53).

The evil of polygamous life is very pervasive. Muslim families are not left out in its debilitating effects. Thomas Patrick Hughes maintains in *A Dictionary of Islam* (1967:314) that “of women who seem good in your eyes, marry two, or three, or four, and if ye still fear that ye shall not act equitably, then one only,... (Quran, Surah iv:3).

Ramatoulaye as a good Muslim is ready to share her husband with Binetou. According to her epistle:

From then on, my life changed. I had prepared myself for equal sharing, according to the precepts of Islam concerning polygamic life. I was left with empty hands.

Even though her husband abandoned her and her twelve children for the second wife, she did not divorce him. She said that she did not have the guts of the liberated women and that she had “never conceived of happiness outside marriage”. She is a traditionalist who believes that once married, only death can tear her apart from that marriage. Emecheta’s heroine in *The Joys of Motherhood* also stuck to her traditional view about marriage, and in the end she was destroyed, though one can say that what destroyed her is not her husband’s polygamous nature but her children’s desertion.

On the other hand, there are women who find it impossible to share their husbands with any woman. Aissatou left Mawdo immediately he married another wife. She defies the fallacy that a woman cannot survive the experience of bringing up boys alone. Amaka also wanted to stick to Obiora but when she found out that there was a grand plan to force her out of her matrimonial home, she left and vowed that one marriage was enough

for her. She is more forceful in her rejection of any kind of marriage with any man.

There is something in that word that does not suit me. As a wife, I am never free. I am a shadow of myself. As a wife I am almost impotent. I am in prison, unable to advance in body and soul. Something gets hold of me as a wife and destroys me. When I rid myself of Obiora, things started working for me. I don't want to go back to that my "wifely" days. No, I am through with husbands. I said farewell to husbands the first day I came to Lagos (Nwapa, 1981:127).

4.3 Abandonment

This is one heavy yoke on the neck of the African woman. Abandonment may take the form of the man physically leaving the woman and her children or he may be there but does not fulfill the traditional role assigned to him as the head of the family or it may even take the two forms. A man may abandon his wife when she is sick or in difficulty. Adizua left his house for Efuru and eloped with another rich woman and Modou deserted his family. Their behaviour is against the custom for it is the woman who abandons the house for the man. The following conversation between Efuru and a woman will illustrate this:

‘Did I hear that you have left your husband?’

‘Yes, he has left me!’

‘Don’t say that, my daughter. We say that a woman has left her husband, but never say that a husband has left his wife. Wives leave husbands not the other way round’.

The modern day woman has the burden of being left by her husband unlike Achebe’s Akueke and Mgbafo who left their husbands, Ibe and Uzowulu, in the *Arrow of God* and *Things Fall Apart* respectively. A Cameroonian posits his people’s custom.

Niam was about thirty-five. I wouldn’t have supposed, from what I know of him, that he took any very great interest in his wife – while she was still around, that is. I would have thought that if she walked out on him, Niam would have been more relieved than sorry (Betí, 1957:7).

The man may also be in the house with his family but expects the wife to feed, clothe, and house the family. Francis falls in this category of men with Adizua. These are mostly men whose upbringing is defective. They grow up believing that it is everybody’s duty to take care of them and pander to their every need. Meanwhile, they are not obliged to anybody, including their parents. His selfishness springs from his doting mother’s poor upbringing.

Francis, I am not your mother. I am me, and I am different from her. It is a mistake to use your mother as a yardstick. You simply tolerated her. I know that now, because it never crossed your mind to work and send her money like other Nigeria students do. That should have warned me. In the short courting period we had I noticed that you never thought of giving her anything. It was always, you all the time and she, poor soul, was always giving and giving you (Emecheta, 1974: 180).

There are also men that abandon their wives in the time of difficulty. Gilbert did not take care of Efuru when she was sick. Instead, he accused her of adultery. There is also the theme of abandonment in E. T. Sutherland's *Edufa*. Edufa pretended that he was interested in his wife getting well quickly. Yet, he was not ready to take her to see any doctor: did not allow his father to see her; did not tell his mother-in-law that she was sick. In short, he preferred Ampoma's death to losing his wealth and position in society. He informs Senchi:

Ask the town. They know who Edufa is and what he's worth. They can count you out my values in the house that eat because I live. Yes, my enterprises feed them. They rise in deference from their chairs when they say my name. If that isn't something, what is? And can a man allow himself to lose grip on that? Let it go? A position like that? You want to

maintain it with substance, protect it from ever-present envy with vigilance (38).

Apart from men that abandon their wives and children, there are sons that abandon their parents and other members of their nuclear families, which they ought to owe a duty. In Sule's case, his abandonment of his family was as a result of his father disowning him. He went to Niger, settled there, married one of their women, and raised his own family. He gave Li his reasons for not coming home: 'I am no longer sure, daughter-of-my-mother. I was born here, but the stranger country nurtured me to manhood, instilled in me a true sense of human values. It was there I understood the full meaning of independence' (Alkali, 1984: 100).

The female writers have proved that after the enormous resources parent's spend on the training of their male children, at the detriment of the female ones, some of them have not lived up to their parents' expectations. Li had to provide accommodation for her father's family, bury her father and grand-parents, take care of the others, though she had two brothers who are supposed to inherit their father's property. In *The Dilemma of a Ghost*, Monka complained that notwithstanding the sacrifices the family made for her brother to go to school, they were still as poor as church rats. Their neighbours gossiped that even though the man was working and earned good salary, his mother's "roof leaks

more than ever before” because he spent almost all his income providing luxurious goods for his black American wife.

Ba’ writes like a psychologist for she probes the mind of her characters. She shows that there are serious negative implications for abandoned wives and children. She uses one of her characters, Jacqueline, an Ivorian Christian who married a Senegalese Muslim, but abandoned by her husband for “slender Senegalese women” and suffers from neurotic disorder, to show the health implications of abandonment on a woman.

Jacqueline’s thoughts turned to death. She waited for it, frightened and tormented, her head on her chest, where the tenacious invisible lump foiled all ruses, scoffed maliciously at all the tranquilizers (1980: 43).

To Amaka, Aissatou, Efuru, and Adah after the emotional trauma they went through, it is good-bye to marriage. Old Nnuego was not that lucky. Having been abandoned by her husband and children, she went mad and later died. Her insanity and death bring out the untruthfulness of the deceptive and ironic title. It shows that motherhood is not the ultimate achievement in a woman’s life.

On the contrary, there are other heroines who see their abandonment as their fate and accommodated it. Ramatoulaye, though abandoned, mourned the husband. Also Li was bitter at the way her husband dumped her. But

with maturity and education, she gained an insight into the human mind and human affairs. She decided to reconcile with him, though crippled by accident. She realized, like Ramatoulaye, that her daughter was part of the man that would always remain with her as long as they lived. She believed:

... that the bond that had tied her to the father of her child was not ruptured. And in spite of everything, in the soft cradle of her heart, there was another baby forming. This time Li was determined the baby would not be stillborn (Alkali, 1984:104-105).

The destructive effect of a father's abandonment of his children can be seen in Daba's reaction to her father. She advised her mother that since the man had abandoned them; they ought to abandon him too. To her, it was tit for tat. All her children reacted like Daba. For she narrates: "My children, who disagreed with my decision, sulked. In opposition to me, they represented a majority I had to respect" (Ba, 1980:46).

Daba's hatred of Binetou's mother and her erstwhile friend who snatched her father from the family is typical of a child that is deeply hurt. She bought up her father's property and brutally ejected them from it as they brutally took their father for them:

Remember. For five years you deprived my mother and her twelve children of their breadwinner. Remember. My mother has suffered a great deal. How can a woman sap the happiness of another? You deserve no pity. Pack up. (71).

4.4 Widowhood

The male writers eulogized the assistance given to widows. In Amadi's *The Concubine*, her brother-in-law with the help of Ekwueme and Wakiri mended Ihuoma's leaking roof. She is protected, defended and helped in defraying the funeral expenses of her late husband.

For his part, Nnadi, Ihuoma's brother-in-law, concentrated on storing dried meat. Instead of selling animals that fell to his many traps, he cut them into bits and smoked them for storage. This would provide the necessary delicacy for the huge pots of soup that would be prepared during the burial rites (1966:30).

On the other hand, the women present a negative image of the widow's situation. It is a word dreaded by every African woman because of the degradation and humiliation meted out to widows in the guise of customary and religious practices. In some communities and in spite of the hard times, widows mourn their husbands for one calendar year. They have their heads scraped of all hair; ate from broken utensils; were banned

from going to the markets; prohibited from taking their bath days and weeks on end. If there is doubt as to the cause of their husbands' death, they are forced to either drink water used for bathing their corpses or take kola-nuts from their palms or swear by deities. Apart from the physical and mental ordeals they go through, they are stripped of all that is left in their houses during the funeral rites.

Another practice, which is a bitter pill the West African woman has to swallow is the concept of wife-inheritance. A woman changes hands several times before her death. Wife-inheritance might be important in the past during slave trade. A widow needed protection then or she and her children would be carried into slavery. A greedy neighbour might also wipe out her family and take the husband's land. But with civilization, with the body of laws that protect the rights of citizens and the court that adjudicate on disputes, the practice ought to be reviewed.

The female writers feel that the most annoying part is that the men are self-centered. They buzz around the widow as flies buzz around a carcass with their different selfish intentions. Some are interested in carting away the widow's assets and dumping the liabilities. Emecheta looks at this theme through her heroine who remembers the disintegration of her family after her father's death. Adah recalls that "like most girl orphans, [she] was to live with her mother's elder brother as a servant, Ma was inherited by Pa's brother, and Boy was to live with one of Pa's

cousins" (174:18). The better arrangement would have been for Pa's brother to take both his late brother's wife and her children instead of sending them away.

Some of the men that line up to inherit a widow may not feed their families yet they want to acquire more responsibilities. Tasmir, like Amtokwu in the *Joys of the Motherhood*, cannot feed his wives and children, yet, he yearns to inherit Ramatoulaye. She vents her suppressed venom on him.

What of your wives, Tasmir? Your income can meet neither their needs nor those of you numerous children (Ba, 1980:58).

4.5 Suggestions

All hands ought to be on deck in order to lighten the burden of the African woman. The fight is the woman's own and she needs to be in its vanguard. Her war plan must consist of first and foremost the following items:

4.5.1 Re-orientation or a new socialization

The West African woman can loosen the chain of her bondage by starting with her children from the cradle. She should make her children, both boys and girls, to appreciate women. The birth of her daughter ought not to be a period of disappointment for her, even when those around her are expecting a boy. The little bundle should be loved not hated; wanted and not rejected; seen as an asset and not a liability; taken as an independent entity

and not an appendage. In the upbringing of all the children she should avoid the attitude where the little girl feels, “‘Is there anything wrong in being a girl?’ Amuche asked, looking herself over as if to ensure she was not leprous” (Ike, 1973:24)

The West African woman has to remove the yoke on her neck by not seeing her own daughter as a breathing movable asset to be disposed of at the whims and caprices of the seller and the purchaser. She should be given formal education to the limit of her ability or the resources in the family. The idea of sacrificing her education for the boys to continue theirs ought to be discouraged. Aidoo dramatizes the stupidity and futility of one packing all her eggs in one basket. Esi sold their family land, pawned the valuable family heirlooms, kentes and golden ornaments, made several fruitless visits to uncles and great uncles who ‘complained that my one son’s education was ruining our home’. At the end her son is educated and has a well-paid job; yet the land and the other family valuables are not redeemed; Esi’s house still leaks; Esi is still poor as when she was paying his school fees. Ato’s sister who stayed at home because her brother was going to school grumbled: “Even I should not be such a pitiable creature now, after all, my brother is now great”. Ato’s interest is only in acquiring the state of the art equipment for his wife. And the other family members are left out in the cold.

The West African woman can free herself from her bondage by purging herself of the ageless delusion that

marriage and motherhood are the reasons for her existence and the pinnacle of her achievement. If she is married and has children, that is excellent. But if she doesn't, she ought not to pine away. She can face her business or whatever occupation she has, adopt a baby or babies and also involve herself in charitable works that will improve the lives of the underprivileged and the disabled members of her society.

The West African woman's load will be lighter if she stops accepting marriage offer from an already married man. She has to respect the feeling and integrity of the other woman as Daoudu Dieng respected that of Modou Fall. Though he loved Ramatoulaye a lot, he did not propose marriage to her until after her husband's demise. The other men kept clear of her even when she was abandoned. That's the reason why she described herself as "a fluttering leaf that no hand dares to pick up". She should stop being eager to displace a fellow woman as Seguwa queried, 'Get out! Get out all of you. Or, are you eager to take Ampoma's place?' (Sutherland, 1967:56). She has to follow the footsteps of Ramatoulaye in the treatment of other women. She applies the golden rule attitude to Dieng and his family:

And then the existence of your wife, and children further complicates the situation. Abandoned yesterday because of a woman, I cannot lightly bring myself between you and your family. You

think the problem of polygamy is a simple one. Those who are involved in it know the constraints, the lies, the injustices that weigh down the consciences in return for the ephemeral joys of change (Bâ, 1980:68).

The West African woman can also help herself to unfetter the manacles on her if in her capacity as a mother-in-law or a sister-in-law; or a daughter or a sister or an aunt or a friend or a neighbour or an employer or an employee or in whatever capacity she finds herself she should desist from running down other women. There is no way a man can think out evil or carry it out against a woman without the active connivance of another woman. It does not lie in his nature. Mawdo's mother brought young Nabou to entice him. She used the younger woman to push out Aissatou from her matrimonial home. Obiora's mother also insisted that Amaka must leave her son's house because of her barrenness. Omirima, Efuru's neighbour, was instrumental to Efuru leaving Enebiri's house.

The West African woman can unfasten her fetters by re-educating her brothers and sons on the need to share their fathers' property with their sisters and daughters. She should also try and persuade her husband to share his property equitably among his children. In this modern time when a lot of water has passed under the bridge, marriages are going through turbulence. A girl's fate ought not to be decided when she is married and has children.

She may end up not marrying; or she may marry and get divorced; or not have children; or she may end up marrying a loafer; or she may marry a polygamist who abandons the woman to take care of their family units; or she may marry and get widowed early. Anything can happen and if she does not inherit any property in her father's house, she will be left out empty-handed.

The West African woman can also untie her tethers by forming non-governmental organisations (NGOS) with other like-minded women at the national, regional and international levels to protect the interests of women. Top on their programme should be the offer of legal assistance to oppressed, battered and marginalized women; give financial help to the financially-crippled ones; give useful pieces of advice to those that are financially buoyant but distressed in mind; and resettle those that are alienated from their families.

4.5.2 Legislation

It is only when she has tried to lessen her burden by herself and it is not possible that others, especially the men, should be called in to assist her. This can be done through legislation. As the world is becoming a global village and the West African region is not left out in the march for globalization, there is the need also to make more women-friendly laws within the region. As the countries that make up the region move towards forming a closer tie between them through the establishment of

uniform travelling documents, and common currency, there is also the need to make laws that protect the rights of women in the region. Such laws ought to include the law against bigamy, fostering freedom from discrimination, right to inheritance, right to own and keep property, right to education, law prohibiting early marriage and marriage without consent, and right to equal share of property at divorce, amongst others.

If these rights are available and they are enforceable, a duty is now incumbent on her to make use of them when the need arises. She does not need to keep quiet and suffer in silence because she shrinks from the social stigma that may be attached to her if she drags anybody to court.

4.6 Conclusion

West African female writers have shown that despite the utopian and romantic pictures of the West African woman as presented by their male counterparts, despite her marginalized or whittled down role in the men's literary texts, she is still weighed down and demoralized by a heavy burden – the burden of motherhood, the burden of polygamy, the burden of abandonment and the burden of widowhood. But she can break the chains that fetter her freedom by her own effort, with little assistance from others.

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Chapter 5

Gendered Social Division of Labour in the African Novel

5.0 Introduction

The essence of this essay is to consider social division of labour in the African novel. The basic division of labour is a basic structural element in social organization (Kuper & Kuper, 1996:191). Unlike other primates and lower animals, human beings have the most advanced and sophisticated division of labour since the “position of the individual in the division of labour influences his whole way of living, his thought, and attitude towards the world” (Mises, 1981). There is no human society without social groupings, which affect and constrain it in different ways. The groupings may depend on race, religion, occupation, class, age and gender (Clarke, 1981:103-104).

One of the aspects of social division of labour is that colonialism introduced social division of labour along racial lines. For example, Joseph Conrad hints that the metaphor and images of darkness are not to be found in the barbarians, who inhabit the jungle of Africa, but in the brutality of the civilized man in his mindless quest for power and wealth. To show that Westerners’ pillaged and plundered the natural and human resources in Africa, Conrad describes the black chain-gang as “Black rags were wound around their heads, and the short ends behind waggle to and fro like tails. I could see every rib, the joints

of their limbs were like knots in a rope; each had an iron collar on his neck, and all were connected together with a chain whose bights swung between them, rhythmically clinging" (1997:43). He contrasts that "moribund shapes", the "black shadows of disease and starvation" with his vision of:

... a white man, in such an unexpected elegance of get-up that in the first moment I took him for a sort of vision. I saw a high starched collar, white cuffs, a white alpaca jacket, snowy trousers, a clear necktie, and snowy varnished boots. No hat. Head parted, brushed, oiled, under a green-lined parasol held in a big white hand. He was amazing, and had penholder under his ears (1997:45)

Another important aspect of social division of labour in the African novel is class. However, this is mainly seen in the novels of social criticism, where the Marxist ideology holds sway. Festus Iyayi, for instance, paints a realistic condition of the two classes – bourgeois and workers – in the Nigerian society. The capitalist or bourgeois class comprises those in the helm of affairs in the country who through corrupt means exploit the workers or labourers. Those are the men and women who "thought and talked about money, how to steal to make money, cheat to make money, work to make money. They talked and concluded that the best way to make money was to steal it from the

government..." (1979:281-282). Iyayi believes that the workers are those whom the oppressive system brutalizes, rapes their manhood and finally forces them to answer violence with violence (1979:185).

Age is also a decider in the social division of labour in the African novel. The aged, particularly in the cultural works, do not exert themselves with physical labour, but are always presented as the "guardians of the mysteries and the laws, and it is in these the cultural heritage of the tribes is expressed" (Jung, 1971:18). Children are also part of the social division of labour but they primarily work under the close supervision of their parents and relations. The boys, for example, indulge in what the society considers to be masculine jobs. In the agrarian community of Umuofia, Nwoye and Ikemefuna have the responsibilities of hewing wood, pounding yam for their mother and step-mothers. They also help the tragic hero, Okonkwo, to mend his compound walls. They may fetch water for the women, but when they get older, they are discouraged from doing so. However, in communities that indulge in domestic husbandry, the boys shepherd the cattle and goats for their fathers (Farah, 1970). The young girls, similarly, are brought up under the eagle eyes of their mothers. They are taught diligently house-keeping roles. It is their gendered responsibility to wash plates, sweep the rooms, fetch water and firewood for cooking. However, there is a violation of this social division of labour in the Nigerian contemporary novels. According to

one of the parents who appears before Justice Okpetun's Commission, children of today, particularly those from upper and middle class background, suffer from "pathological laziness". He insists:

The children did nothing to help in the house, the boys as well as the girls. No assistance with the preparation of meals; nor with washing up after meals; nor cleaning up the house; nor even with making up their beds. Their bedrooms resembled a madman's hut! As for their laundry, they would simply pile them up until the steward was available to attend to them (Ike, 2004:158-159).

However, the most important aspect of social division of labour in the African novel is gender-based. It is from this gendered division of labour, using particularly the African cultural and feminist literary texts, that this critical appraisal will adopt to examine the domestic and public spheres of social division of labour in the African novel. Language and stylistic devices used in the reflection of gendered social division of labour in some of these works will be discussed later. However, works from other literary genres from all regions of Africa will be used for the proper elucidation of this topic.

5.1 Gender-Sensitivity in Social Division of Labour

There are roles, which each society overtly and tacitly assigns to its male and female members for the smooth running and corporate existence of the society. And for this reason, gender has been described as a “situated accomplishment of social members. The local management of conduct in relation to normative conceptions of appropriate attitudes and activities for particular sex categories” (Wallace & Zimmerman, 1987). And in Plato’s opinion “... none of the occupations which comprehend the ordering of a state belong to woman as woman, nor yet to man as man; but natural gifts are to be found here and there in both sexes alike...” (1997:55).

Because gender is very crucial in the social division of labour in every society, gender-difference study has been a controversial one in the social sciences. Some feminist psychologists have regarded with suspicion the research findings of their male colleagues. This group of women sees it as a continuation of the subordination of women. According to Jessie Bernard quoted in Alice Eagly, “... it is a battle weapon against women” (1995:149). However, Alice Eagly believes that gender comparisons are positive achievements for women as their findings are “evidence of women’s oppression... and can be deployed to attract attention to women’s plight and to galvanize people into action to raise women’s status” (Walsh, 1997:30). Besides, Rachael Hare-Mustin and Jeane Merecek advise women that gender-difference study is indispensable to them, as

the absence of such findings will result in their blind treatment at places of work, ignoring their childbearing and child-rearing roles (1994).

5.2 Social Division of Labour at the Domestic Level

The organization of the family in the highly patriarchal African societies rests with the man. He is at the apex of the family tree in the hierarchy of individuals in each family unit. And there are certain roles, which he ought to discharge, if he is not to become a laughing stock for the other members of his society. His society expects him to get married if he is not a nonentity. Achebe in his cultural novels informs the reader that in his culture, bachelorhood is frowned at and a full-grown man who is not married is regarded as an *efulefu* or a ne'er-do-well. To avoid the scorn of his society, he either finds a wife for himself or his parents get one betrothed to him as a minor. Either way, he is expected to formalize the marriage by the payment of bride price to the bride's family. Ibe in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* pays twenty bags of cowries to his father-in-law, Obierika.

One essential element of formalization of marriage is the payment of bride price to the parents of the bride by the bridegroom. Ibe pays twenty bags of cowries to his father-in-law. In some other communities, the bride price may take a different form. For the Bandas, Batouala reflects on how much he paid to marry his favourite wife:

To marry her hadn't he paid seven loincloths, a case of salt, three copper collars, a female dog, four cooking pots, thirty chickens, ten female goats, twenty-four large baskets full of millet, and a young slave! (Maran, 1921:88)

In the feminist novels, a man who cannot pay the bride price fixed by his community is treated with disdain, and this underscores the image of the man as a nonentity. In Nwapa's *Efuru*, Adizua is unable to pay the bride price on his wife. For this, his identity and penury become the subjects for the village gossips: 'He is not known. And nobody knows why she ever married him, and besides, not a cowrie has been paid on her head' (1966:18). Also Ramatoulaye's doomed marriage is presented thus:

But I preferred the man in the eternal khaki suit. Our marriage was celebrated without dowry, without pomp, under the disapproving looks of my father, before the painful indignation of my frustrated mother, under the sarcasm of my surprised sisters, in our town struck dumb with astonishment (Bâ, 1980:16).

An unmarried girl in her late teens is a source of worry to her parents and relations, the educated ones are not exceptions. Most importantly, she is looked down upon and used as the family's beast of burden.

It is worse than a prison, Li complained one day as she sat with her brothers and sisters in the cooking hut. Awa looked at her sullenly and shook her head. At eighteen she was the eldest child in the family, five years older than Li. Still unmarried, she shouldered half of the responsibility in the house (Alkali, 1984:3).

Also in *Mine Boy*, Leah is worried that her niece, Eliza, is not yet married and wants to foist her on Xuma, whom she feels is responsible and can take good care of her (Abraham, 1946).

While the couple is living together as husband and wife, there are certain responsibilities, which the society allocates to them, which they ought to discharge diligently for the well-being of their family and the society at large.

5.3 A Man's Responsibilities to his Family

Though every African society allows a full-fledged man to marry as many wives as he wishes, and the number of children he desires, it is his sole responsibility to feed them, as each society has its criteria for measuring a man's standing. For Achebe's tragic hero, Okonkwo, his agrarian clan measures a man's wealth by the size of his family, the number of titles he has taken for himself and for his male children, the size of his barn, his mastery of the art of wrestling and the number of human heads he has to his credit. The narrator makes it clear that though Okonkwo

does not have the start in life, which many young men enjoy, he has to toil from morning till night to feed his large family. In fact, he climbs the ladder of success in a tedious, crop-sharing method with Nwakibie. Camara Laye also describes how his uncle, Lansana, will work on his farm from dawn to dusk, all in an effort to feed his family (Laye, 1954). Each society does not expect a man to feed his family on just any type of food. For example, Okonkwo's Umuofia expects him to feed his family on a particular type of food: yam. A man is said to be wealthy if he can feed his family on yam from year to year. The reverence with which yam is regarded in the agrarian Umuofia is seen in Okonkwo's reflection: "Yam stood for manliness, and he who can feed his family on yams from one harvest to another was a very great man indeed". Okonkwo wanted his son to be a great farmer and a great man (Achebe, 1958:23). Therefore, yam in Igbo is regarded as masculine and the king of crops. For a man to be regarded as wealthy in Igbo society, he must plant hectares of yam seedlings. To the Gikuyus in Kenya, Nyakinyua informs her listeners what her society regards as the masculine crops: "For a woman alone cannot do all the work on the farm. How could she grow sugar cane, yams, sweet potatoes which used to be men's domain" (Ngugi, 1977:213). Ngugi also shows that it is the responsibility of the man as the head of his family to buy the major ingredients for the preparation of the family meals as "Ngotho bought four pounds of meat. But they

were bound into bundles each of two pounds. One bundle was for his first wife" (1964:10).

The same responsibility thrusts on every man by his society is dramatized vividly, though in a satirical manner, in the Egyptian-born Al-Hakim's *The Fate of a Cockroach* where Adil tells his domineering wife:

Yes, the world that is gained by striving. You take everything I have and I take nothing of yours. You get hold of the whole of my salary and I can't touch a millieme of yours. All the payments, expenses, bills, installments, all come out of my pocket, your dressmaker - your hairdresser – the installments on your car – your petrol, your 'fridge – your washing machine – your Butagas (1973:31).

Any man who is incapable of feeding his family is regarded as a weakling and he is the butt of his community's ribaldry. Because Okonkwo's Umuofia hates laziness, and because his father dies as a lazy, improvident man, Okonkwo has a pathological fear of failure and weakness. He does not want to be associated with his father, whom he despises. As a little boy, his playmate insults him by calling his father *agbala*, which in his language is a man who has no title or a woman. He thinks about his father's improvidence thus:

That was years ago, when he was young, Unoka, the grown-up was a failure. He was poor and his wife and children had barely enough. People laughed at him because he was a loafer, and they swore never to lend him any more money because he never paid back (1958:4).

It is the same contempt that Okonkwo has for his father that he extends to his son, Nwoye. He has a morbid fear of Nwoye's ability for the continuation of the genealogy of his family, the system of inheritance, succession and ancestral ministration.

As D.U. Opatata succinctly puts it:

No person wants his name to go into extinction, and the surest way to preserve that name in a traditional society was for the person to have male children who would continue with the family name and the sense of tradition (1998:16).

There is no distinction between a lazy man and a drunk, as both of them are incapable of feeding their families. The agony of a lazy man's or a drunk's wife is not different from that of a widow. Madume, who is in his late thirties, is a very lazy man. His yams are few and the roofs of his huts are caving in and his compound walls are in a dilapidated condition (Amadi, 1966:4). Also Omozere in

Efuru is a drunk unable to fulfill his role as a breadwinner to his family. His wife's suffering and contemptuous attitude to him is reflected in her use of language: "Foolish man, an over-grown child, stupid man. A man who has children and cannot afford to feed them, but drinks every day and plays with children" (Nwapa, 1966:93).

The patriarchs consistently insist that a man ought to feed his family, and the work he does to achieve that is immaterial. He may borrow money from friends, relations and banks for that purpose, but definitely not from the women-folk. In *No Longer at Ease*, Obi Okonkwo contemplates getting a loan from either a bank or a moneylender instead of Clara, his fiancée. Niyi complains bitterly to Enitan the cause of his separation with his first wife: "She was a doctor, and I would be what? All the time we were in Lagos, she was telling everybody I couldn't provide. Now she wanted me to go to another country and take an odd job" (Atta, 2005: 169).

It is unheard of that a woman is the breadwinner in a family where the man is physically and mentally healthy. This is a reversal of role that started with colonialism, and that is why the African feminist writers question the headship and masculinity of the man. Ramatoulaye complains in her epistle to Aissatou: "I was surviving. In addition to my former duties, I took over Modou's as well. The purchase of basic food stuffs kept me occupied at the end of every month..." (Bâ, 1980:51). In Buchi Emecheta's novels, the women are breadwinners of their families. Her

negative portrayal of all her male characters in her fictional works forces a critic to comment that she overstepped her bound in portraying male characters in her novels in exaggerated state of idiocy and irresponsibility. And that she adopts her personal experience and makes it seem of universal application. (Acholonu, 1988). However, in another critical appraisal of *Second Class Citizen*, the critic lauds "The spirit of determination and the will to survive are naturally repleted in Adah, who is Emecheta's *alter ego*" (Egudu, 2006:127).

However, it is not only the female voices that condemn some men's abdication of their traditional roles. Some male writers are sympathetic to the plight of women in this reversal of role and its evil consequences. A Nigerian novelist examines the tearing down of family and social values this breeds.

Thus he [Obanua] thought to punish them by not giving them the monthly allowance, expecting each instead to make an effort to support the household from the proceeds of her trade.... And so each of them left him completely out of account and instead laboured for the upkeep of her own side of the family, including feeding and the children's school fees (Okpewho, 1970:28-29).

A man's other essential necessity after feeding is clothing. He wears clothes to cover his nakedness, to shield himself from the natural elements and as ornament. In Africa, the provision of this basic need is the responsibility of the head of the family. He clothes himself, his wife and children. And one of the criteria for the measurement of a man's standing in his society is the type of clothing and ornaments worn by his wife at important occasions.

The market place was filling up with men and women from every quarter. Because it was specially their day, the women wore their finest cloths and ornaments of ivory and beads according to the wealth of their husbands, or in a few exceptional cases, the strength of their arms (Achebe, 1964:66).

Achebe still insists that in his culture, a man of substance, a man of achievement is noted through his wife's dressing: "Anisi was a middle-aged woman, tall and strongly built. There was authority in her bearing and she looked every inch the ruler of the women-folk in a large and prosperous family. She wore the anklet of her husband's titles, which the first wife alone could wear" (1958:14). In *Violence*, Idemudia reflects sadly on the sacrifices he has made to ensure his wife does not look outside. He has sold his blood several times to feed her. And also for the "past year or more, he hadn't bought a single shirt for himself. All the money he got he had spent

on buying her a few clothes, so she would not go naked as he went naked..." (Iyayi, 1979:256).

Apart from clothing his wife, he is also expected to provide the wife the money for the children's attire. In *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, the Man vehemently refuses to join in the moral and physical decay, the spiritual aridity around him, and the prevalent bribery and corruption in post-independent Ghana. He is regarded as an irresponsible man and a failure because he cannot clothe his family. He faces boldly the contempt, cynicism and ostracism of his colleagues in his office and that of his family members at home. His mother-in-law taunts him with this scathing remark: "Where is the wound, my husband? Where is it? You must know you have nobody, you are an orphan, a complete orphan.. You mustn't run around, like people who have men behind them, to buy them shoes. My poor husband?" (Armah, 1968:123).

It necessarily follows that a man who cannot feed his family, and cannot equally clothe is regarded as being irresponsible. In *Efuru*, Adizua abandons his duty by not buying outing clothes for his wife. She has to manage her old ones. The narrator informs the reader: "She knew that both cloths were very nice, and what was more they fitted the occasion. They were the clothes her mother left for her. She bought them many years ago and whenever there was a festival or the second burial of a relative, the clothes served very well" (Nwapa, 1966:19). Efuru, therefore, buys dresses for herself, her daughter, her

mother-in-law and her maid. Like her, Nwabata buys dresses for her husband even at the period of their courtship (Nwapa, 1966). Besides, Adah lashes out at Francis for his abdication of his social responsibility. "Can you, Francis, show me some vests or anything these children can lay their hands upon which you bought for them?" (Emecheta, 1974:189)

Besides, a man's responsibilities do not stop at feeding and clothing his family, he also has to shelter them. In *Batouala*, the novelist shows the Banda custom where the head of the family fulfills his social role.

It is the rule of the Bandas of every tribe that each married woman must have her own hut in addition to the conjugal residence. Batouala, her husband, had hurried to build her one in the days following their marriage. Since then, she went to it each time she didn't spend the night with her lord and master, or when she needed, for one reason or another, a moment of solitude (Maran, 1921:43-44).

This role is not limited to the Bandas in Central Africa, Achebe also describes this among the Igbo ethnic group in the Eastern part of Nigeria. In Okonkwo's Umuofia, a man, if he is lucky can inherit compound walls, huts and barns from his father. If he is not, he has to build one for himself. He may solicit the help of his friends, relations and sons to do this. As Okonkwo's seven years in exile is drawing to an

end, he requests his friend to build huts for him in his old, demolished compound; but there is a limitation to this request.

As soon as he entered his last year in exile Okonkwo sent money to Obierika to build him two huts in his old compound where he and his family would live until he built more huts and outside wall of his compound. He could not ask another man to build his own *obi* for him, or the walls of his compound. Those things are built for himself or inherited from his father (Achebe, 1958:115).

In *Arrow of God*, Achebe again stresses the importance of this traditional role. Ezeulu instructs his sons to assist Obika in constructing huts before his new bride moves in. In Guinea, the situation is the same. Laye narrates how his father builds him a hut and provides him with men's clothes after his initiation into manhood (1955:112-113).

The head of the family does not only build the compound walls and houses, the duty of mending them also rest with him. Achebe's tragic hero lives up to his social responsibility: "Okonkwo and the two boys were working on the outer walls of the compound. This was one of the lighter works of the after-harvest season. A new cover of thick palm branches and palm leaves was set on the walls to protect them from the next rainy season.

Okonkwo worked from the outside and the boys from within" (1958:39).

He further emphasizes this social responsibility, for after the elders of Umuofia's release from detention, Okika addresses his clansmen in such a manner as to underscore the importance of the meeting. He says, 'You all know why we are here when we ought to be building our barns or mending our huts, when we should be putting our compounds in order' (1958:143).

It is regarded as a serious dereliction of duty if his wife helps him to provide shelter for his family. In *Efuru*, the reader is told that "in no time they bought another canoe, which they also gave out on hire and when Efuru saw that they could afford to build a house they began the house. They were going to rebuild the father's house first and later, they would build their own house in the new layout" (Nwapa, 1966:136). Li also takes a critical look at her late father's compound, which is very dilapidated and calls it "a house without a man". Though she has two brothers, Awa calls her "the man of the house" because: "At last she has accomplished her ambitions. She is a successful teacher and an owner of a huge modern and enviable building. The rest of the huts have been demolished" (Alkali, 1984:101). Buchi Emecheta frowns at a situation where a man that lives in an urban area can neither build his own house nor pay rent to the landlord of the house; hence, he leaves his wife saddled with that responsibility. Adah angrily queries Francis "... but was there a month

when your father did not pay the rent?' (Emecheta, 1974:189)

The patriarchs expect only a widow's house to be in a shambles; nevertheless, her brother-in-law, male relations, friends and her grown-up sons can repair her leaking roofs for her. Nnadi, Ihuoma's brother-in-law, assisted by Ekwueme and Wakiri repaired Ihuoma's huts. It is a shameful thing for an able-bodied man to allow his compound and houses to be in a shambles. His wife can humiliate him and make him an object of fun, if he allows his house to be in an uninhabitable state. Madume's wife shames him for his laziness and dereliction of duty:

His compound was small with only two houses in it. Indeed he did not care for more houses since thatching them in the rainy season was a job he hated. His wife always complained of leaking roof and had threatened on one occasion to thatch the house herself, to shame him before the village (Amadi, 1966:4).

The African societies see it as the responsibility of grown-up children, particularly the sons, to provide good shelter for their aged parents. Two novelists hint at the displacement of this timeless social order for different reasons. Dr. Amilo Kanu, a medical doctor and one of the highly placed administrators during the Biafran war, does not have a house in his village. In fact, his parents live in a

leaking house, which their son-in-law mends for them. (Ike, 1976). Besides, the extent of Eugene Achike's brainwashing by a Catholic Priest is seen in his total rejection of his father and the values he stands for. Though a rich man, his own daughter observes her grandfather's dilapidated compound. The naïve narrator says: "The compound was barely the size of our backyard in Enugu.... The house that stood in the middle of the compound was small, compact like dice, and it was hard to imagine Papa and Auntie Ifeoma growing up here" (Adichie, 2004:63).

Furthermore, a man as the head of his family takes the major decisions in his household. If he cannot do that, he is regarded as a weakling. Nyakobi tries to dissuade Ngotho from joining the national strike and he warns her, 'I must be a man in my own house' (Ngugi, 1964:52). Every man in his right senses cherishes his masculinity and does not like the idea of being thought effeminate. Okonkwo is equal to his social role as the head of the family. And in furtherance of this, Achebe informs the reader that "Okonkwo ruled his household with a heavy hand. His wives, especially the youngest, lived in perpetual fear of his fiery temper, and so did his little children" (9).

In his decision-making and taking, he is not expected to consider his wife's feelings, opinions, reactions, emotions and sentiments. Achebe's tragic heroes, Okonkwo and Ezeulu, are the archetypes of the patriarchs that think it an insult consulting their wives in their

decision-making and taking. Okonkwo neither consults nor confides in Nwoye's mother before bringing in Ikemefuna to live with her. However, a literary critic finds this image of the African woman objectionable and writes, "In the house, she was not part of the decision-making both as a daughter, wife and mother even when the decision affected her directly" (Chukwuma, 1994:215). Helen Chukwuma's observation is also borne out in *Arrow of God* where Akueke is not consulted before her father agrees with his son-in-law and his relations that she will come back to him. The old priest also sidelines Ugoye and her protest that her son will not be sent to the mission school. He arrogantly warns her: "How does it concern you what I do with my sons? You say you do not want Oduche to follow strange ways. Do you not know that in a great man's household there must be people who follow strange ways?" (1964:46)

Like Okonkwo and Ezeulu, Laye's father insists on his son going to France for further studies despite his mother's protest and misgivings. Also Mazi Laza in Chukwuemeka Ike's *The Potter's Wheel*, sends his only son, Obu, to live with teacher Zaccheus Kanu despite the wife's objection. The same critic notes the docility and submission of will expected and demanded from the women-folk.

Ebla in *From a Crooked Rib* was promised to Giumleh by her grand-father for an exchange of

camels, her cousin later sold her and the cow in marriage to the broker Dirir for a thousand shillings. Adah's mother was asking for a high bride-price which circumscribed Adah's suitors to old bald men who can afford the price (Chukwuma, 1994:215-216).

The African patriarch is unwilling to share this role with any of his children, including his grown-up sons. The absolute exercise of his authority usually brings him into conflict with his sons. Edogo resignedly thinks about his father's quarrel with Obika in particular and his relationship with his children in general.

Everybody agreed that Obika's friendship with Ofoedu would not bring about any good, but Obika was no longer a child and if he refused to listen to advice he should be left alone. That was what their father could never learn. He must go on treating his grown children like little boys, and if they ever said no there was a big quarrel (Achebe, 1964:91).

Also in *Purple Hibiscus*, Eugene Achike closes his eyes to his son's demand for the recognition of his growing masculinity, which pitches him into conflict with him. As Kambili narrates, "There was a shadow crowding Papa's eyes, a shadow that had been in Jaja's eyes. Fear. It had left Jaja's eyes and clouded Papa's (p. 13). He prefers the

advice and opinions of his friends to those of his wife and children. Obierika and Akuebue were Okonkwo's and Ezeulu's confidants respectively. Ngotho vehemently refuses to take the oath of secrecy administered by his son, Boro. He bases his objection on Gikuyu principle:

After all, oath-taking as a means of binding a person to a promise was a normal feature of a tribal life. But to be given by a son! That would have violated against his standing as a father. A lead in that direction could only come from him, the head of the family. Not from a son; not even when he had been to many places and knew many things. That gave him no right to reverse the custom and tradition for which he and those of his generation stood (Ngugi, 1964:74).

Not only that the man does not want to share this role with his wife, but also women themselves are not comfortable with men who are incapable of making and taking independent decisions. In *Everything Good Will Come*, Sefi Atta shows the dilemma of a purported head of a family who fails in his social responsibility to his family. Niyi loses his first wife because he cannot provide for her and the second because he is incapable of taking decisions without consulting his father and brothers. As frustrated Enitan packs her baggage to leave his house, she queries him, "What kind of man are you?" (p. 336). Adah is

dissatisfied that her father-in-law virtually runs her home. For this reason, Okonkwo is not comfortable with Nwoye's character because he fears that he will be as weak as his late father. And that is the reason Abiola Irele believes that "Nwoye thus stands as a symbolic negation of his father, the living denial of all that Okonkwo accepts and stands for" (Beier, 1967:170).

However, a man may confide in his wife, especially when he is in love with her and the woman is not a gossip, and she is not fickle-minded. Ogbuefi Ndulue and Ozoemena are very close that people say they have one mind. She dies immediately she confirms that Ndulue is dead. Obierika further explains to his guests: 'I remember when I was a young boy there was a song about them. He could not do anything without telling her (48).

Moreover, in the patriarchal African societies, as a woman reaches a certain age, she acquires the status of a man; she sits with the men at meetings and contributes to decisions taken at the family and societal levels. For her to get to this position, she must be old, responsible, wise, courageous and has solid, personal achievements to her credit, which may be the number of sons she has or her contributions to her community. Nyakinyua decides for Ilmorogians who stays to teach their children in their village school and who will not stay. Also in their epic journey to the city to see their representative in government during the drought, she persuades them thus:

I think we should go. It is our turn to make things happen. There was a time when things happened the way we in Ilmorog wanted them to happen. We had power over the movement of our limbs. We made up our words and sang them and we danced to them. But there came a time when this power was taken from us.... We must sing our tune and dance to it. Those out there can also, for a change, dance to the actions and words of us that sweat, of us that feel the pain of bearing... But Ilmorog must go as one voice (Ngugi, 1977:115-116).

Also Naa Yomo is a repository of so much knowledge of her people's history and tradition and this helps in the solution of the mystery of the murdered girl. Vickie and Kabria agree that if the contents in her head can be deciphered with a click of a mouse, she can fill up another George Padmore Library (Darko, 2004:122).

Moreover, the man is responsible for the security of his family. Achebe's description of Okonkwo's physique shows that he is a very virile man capable of protecting his family. He is "tall and huge with bushy eyebrows and wide nose". Also he "breathed heavily and when he walked his heels hardly touched the ground and he seemed to walk on springs" (p. 3). The African man appreciates his virility and this is evident in the description of another character. Elechi Amadi narrates that Emenike is going through overgrown, winding path. He believes he hears someone cough

and he tightens his hand on his razor-sharp machete and swings his wine calabash over his shoulder with his left hand. Though a venerable old chief has died and headhunters are stalking in the forest, he is not afraid. (1966:1).

However, if the man is old, the responsibility of the security of the family shifts to his grown-up sons. Hence, Obika beats Ibe mercilessly with the connivance of his father for his incessant battering of his sister, Akueke, which is an insult on the entire Ezeulu household. But this is not the case where the man is alive, young and healthy. If he cannot provide security to his family, he is treated with derision. Nwabata's complaint to Efuru and other sympathizers is calculated to deride her husband:

Yes, it was then that my lord and master came out with his knife. Kill me, I said to him. I am the thief. He fooled around and went and sat down outside the gate. That's the man who is my husband. Women are nothing. He, my husband, was asleep when thieves came to the house. But I am only a woman. What can a woman do? (Nwapa, 1966:178)

Also Jaja in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* regrets his inaction at his father's assault and battery on the family, particularly on his mother. Obiora's diligence in protecting his widowed mother highlights his own negligence at stopping his father's brutality on the family.

In addition to the above, it is the man's responsibility to bury his close relations, especially his parents. The patriarchs in the cultural works do not regard death as connoting finality because of their world-view on death, which is quite different from that of the Christian religion. It is generally seen as a transition from the world of the living to that of the ancestors from where the dead oversee and participate in the activities of the living. Wanja tells Karega of her grand-mother's demise: 'She died the same night... and I shall never forget her words of pride and joy... "I am coming to join you, my warrior..." and she closed her eyes' (Ngugi, 1977:325). This Gikuyu worldview on death is not different from that of the other African ethnic groups. A scholar notes:

A person who is deemed to have died well in Igboland is one who first and foremost reached old age before dying. Secondly, the person must have had children and grandchildren who are well-to-do. Thirdly, the person must have died the sort of death in which all the needed burial and funeral rites must be performed. Fourthly and perhaps not very important is that the person would have died at an opportune time.... Finally, the person who is deemed to have died well is also deemed free from all associations with the factors... constituting evil/bad death (Opata, 1998:175).

The Bandas, like other Africans, believe that a dead man is on a long journey and he needs things, which will make it less tedious. Therefore, a dead person is buried with some of his cherished earthly possession.

Surely, the dry wood and the mat will prevent the falling earth from troubling his sleep. Moreover, he has within arm's reach his pots and his usual loincloths. So if by chance he had the urge to go wandering among the villages of the living, he could. And if he were hungry and thirsty, he could cook or quench his thirst. If he were cold, he could dress himself (Maran, 1921:97).

This Bandas culture of equipping the dead with his earthly treasure for a smooth voyage to the world beyond is also narrated in *The Joys of Motherhood*. A noble or his spouse cannot be buried without a slave.

In the evening it was time to put Agunwa in her grave. All the things that she would need in her after-life were gathered and arranged in her wooden coffin, which was made of the best mahogany Agbadi could find. Then her personal slave was ceremoniously called in a loud voice by the medicine man. She must be laid inside the grave first. A good slave was supposed to jump inside the grave willingly, happy to accompany her mistress;

but this young and beautiful woman did not wish to die (Emecheta, 1979:23).

The burial of the deceased, whether young or old, male or female, rich or poor, is the responsibility of the male members of his family. They have to dig the grave and inter him therein. Nwapa describes this ancient role to underscore Adizua's irresponsibility as a father, a husband and a son: "Efuru watched the men as they lowered her only child into the coffin. She stood there like a statute with tears running down her cheeks" (1966:76). Further down the page, she continues, "The men placed the coffin in the canoe and about six of them paddled the canoe to the grave-yard where they buried it". This role is not confined to a particular culture. Ramatoulaye solemnly contrasts the loud, empty discussions of women with the dignified presence of men at funeral ceremonies. She says: "The group eats in silence. Perhaps they remember the stiff body, tied up and lowered by their hands into a gaping hole, quickly covered up again" (Bâ, 1980:5-6).

However, in some African societies, this responsibility may be discarded since it is not every corpse that is acceptable to the earth goddess. These are neither buried nor mourned by anybody. They include those who died of abominable diseases like leprosy, swollen stomach, *ogbanje* children, women that died in labour, those killed by deities and those that took their own lives. Some of these cultural practices survive up to this day despite the

white men's civilizing mission in Africa. Hence, Obierika bemoans the calamity that befalls his friend, Okonkwo. He tells the District Commissioner, 'We cannot bury him. We shall pay your men to do it. When he had been buried we will then do our duty to him. We shall make sacrifices to cleanse the desecrated land' (147). On the same page, he blames the administrator for his death: "That man was one of the greatest men in Umuofia. You drove him to kill himself; and now he will be buried like a dog..." (Achebe, 1958). Elechi Amadi also corroborates the contemptuous treatment given to such a corpse: 'We have to wait for him. Suicide is so abominable that we cannot do otherwise', Wosu said, shrugging. And for the deceased's burial in the Evil Forest, the reader is told: "Late that afternoon Anyika arrived back in the village. Armed with amulets and powerful charms, he cut down the body. He fortified two strangers, who were to bear the body against evil spirits. Then began the long trek to Minita the forest into which bodies rejected by the earth were thrown (1966:77).

Even though it is the responsibility of the men to bury the deceased, his funeral ceremony, if he does not have grown up children is borne by his wife. She may be helped by the brothers-in-law if she is unable to foot the whole bills alone.

Ihuoma was very sure many people would attend. Her husband had been a popular young man and his

friends would come to pay him their last respects. The prospects of having to feed many people did not frighten her. She knew it was her duty and that the more efficiently she discharged it the more honour she would accord her departed husband (Amadi, 1966:30).

This duty of the surviving spouse to the deceased is not confined to only one ethnic group in Africa. Ramatoulaye meditates on the expensive nature of her husband's funeral rites: "On the third day, the same comings and goings of friends, relatives, the poor, the unknown. The name of the deceased, who was popular, has mobilized a buzzing crowd, welcomed in my house that had been stripped of all that could be stolen, all that could be spoilt..." (Bâ, 1980:5).

However, if the man's children are adults, especially the sons, they ought to shoulder his funeral expenses. Amalu's sons and kinsmen in anticipation of the New Yam Festival announces their late father's second burial (Achebe, 1964:217). In another literary work, he reiterates this duty: Obi wondered whether he had done the right thing in not setting out for Umuofia yesterday. But what would have been the point going? It was more useful to send all the money he could for the funeral instead of wasting it on petrol to get home (1960:147).

This role is prevalent in all African cultures. A North African playwright examines this role among his people. Asakir informs her son:

Even your father's funeral waits for you, Alwan. These animals have been prepared for slaughter; my wailing, which I have imprisoned in my throat all these years, waits for you to burst forth; my gown that I have refrained from rending all this time bides your coming; everything in our existence is lifeless and stagnant and looks to you to charge it with life (Al-Hakim, 1973:85).

Contrastingly, the African feminist novelists trumpet the men's abdication of this ancient and sacred duty to the dead. Adizua is absent when his only child dies. A neighbour gossips about the new bizarre behaviour: 'Yes, that was what happened. While he was away, their only child died, and he was sent for, and up till now, now that we are talking, he has not come back. Many people returned and said that he heard about the death of his child' (Nwapa, 1966:90). Unfortunately, Enebiri is also absent in his father-in-law's funeral and his aunt complains to his mother:

You must send some people to go for your son. This is getting too much. A man like Nwashike Ogene died and your son did not come home. Nearly

everybody in this town came home at the time. And Enebiri, the husband of Efuru Ogene, failed to return. This is four weeks since the death (206).

Besides, a female voice from Nigeria calls attention to this growing trend. 'A house without a man', Li wailed inwardly. "Where is Sule, son-of-my-mother?" She single-handedly sponsored her father's and grandparents' funeral ceremonies that Awa says to her, "The mourners are outside and waiting for you. You are the man of the house now" (Alkali, 1984:101). Eugene Achike's brand of Catholicism shows him rejecting his father in life and in death. He neither sees the father's corpse nor participates in his burial because he dies a traditionalist, without receiving "extreme unction". Auntie Ifeoma buries Papa-Nnukwu alone because "I (Eugene) cannot participate in a pagan funeral..." (p. 188). Eugene Achike's rejection of his social responsibility is as a result of the contempt and trauma he has undergone under a brutal Catholic priest. And this is the indictment François Mauriac has for the church, "... there runs through Christian history, for all kinds of reasons, an attitude of invincible scorn towards less developed peoples" (Moller, 1970:p. 19).

The male writers are not unaware of this drift. Achebe consistently draws attention to this perceived abdication of this social responsibility. The burial of one's parents is very crucial that an Igbo proverb has it that when a man buries his parents, he has nothing much to do again.

Africans marry for different reasons and the most important among them is to have children. Children that will go on errand for him, look after him in old age, mourn and dress him up when he is dead. A barren woman emphasizes the relevance of children in the theme of motherhood: "Your machines, my stranger-girl, cannot go on an errand. They have no hands to dress you when you are dead. But you have one machine to buy now. That which will weep for you, stranger-girl. You need that most" (Aidoo, 1965:36).

African writers feel that this role abandonment is attributed to two things - the white man's education and his religion. The strangeness of Obi Okonkwo's and his father's earlier behaviour in not going to their parents' funeral is attributed to imported, alien culture that leaves one at the cross-roads. An elderly member of Umuofia Progressive Union living in Lagos explains to others: "This boy that we are talking about, what has he done? He was told that his mother died and he did not care. It is a strange and surprising thing, but I can tell you that I have seen it before. His father did it" (Achebe, 1960:145).

He further shows that the situation is monstrous but needs a drastic solution. Chinua Achebe uses an Igbo fable where tortoise tries to avoid burying his mother, sets out on a long journey and instructs his people that they must not look for him, except if a strange thing happens. When his mother dies, they bring him back to bury her by telling him an outlandish story that his father's palm tree has

borne fruits at the end of its leaf. He agrees to come home; thus, they foil his attempt to avoid footing his mother's funeral bills (1960:148-149).

5.4 A Woman's Duties to her Family

Motherhood is the most important role her society expects from her. This is the most important reason why the African man marries, as Okeke Onenyi articulated: "Different people have different reasons for marrying. Apart from children, which we all want, some men want a woman to help on the farm. Others want somebody they can beat" (Achebe, 1964:63). Every African society cherishes children, and the value placed on them is priceless and incomparable to other treasures. The peak of a woman's achievement is her motherhood. Lawino sings:

At the lineage shrine
The prayers are for birth!
At the **ogodo** dance
The woman who struts
And dances proudly,
That is the mother of many,
That is the fortunate one;
And she dances
And looks at her own shadow (P' Bitek, 1966:68).

Woe betides her if she cannot fulfill this most important role in her life. She is an object of scorn to everybody

around her – her husband, parents, neighbours and the entire community. Adah does not disappoint her parents-in-law on that because, apart from the fact she earns a good salary, she is prolific, which among her ethnic group is the greatest asset a woman can have (Emecheta, 1974:28). Also in Ghana, the same attitude prevails as there is the “equation of the essence of womanhood to reproduction.... Who is frowned upon more in this society? The single unmarried mother or the childless married woman?” (Darko, 2004 : 138) It is a common practice in this society that sixteen-year-old girls, who are childless are called “man-woman” and children “have been reduced to trademarks” (p. 139).

Also Efuru’s friend queries her: “What is that to you? What is money? Can a bag of money go for an errand for you? Can a bag of money mourn you when you are dead? A child is more valuable than money. So our fathers said” (Nwapa, 1966:37).

It is a trite statement that a woman’s yearning to be a mother is not only socially-induced but also biological. Wanja, a prostitute who throws away her illegitimate child as a teenager, as an adult desperately wants to conceive. For this reason, she hops into bed with many men. At last she gets pregnant outside wedlock and proudly confides in her mother, ‘I think ... I am ... I think I am with child, No, I am sure of it, mother’ (Ngugi, 1977:338). Besides, Enitan’s joy is boundless at the birth of Yimika, while her friend,

Sheri, stays unmarried because she has lost her womb during an abortion as a teenager (Atta, 2005).

The woman is expected not only to be prolific, but she must also have children of a particular sex. The importance of male children is not lost on the patriarchy, for Okonkwo wishes several times that his favourite daughter, Ezinma, is a boy. The Gikuyus prefer boys over girls as seen in Ilmorogians' reception of Nderi wa Riera: "They trooped to the Jecvanjee Gardens and, as they approached the others, the women ululated the five Ngemi usually sung for a male child and a returning victorious hero" (Ngugi, 1977:181). Also Obu's mother has five girls before his birth. But before that, her husband's relations have mounted pressure on him to marry another wife who will give him the desired male children (Ike, 1973:9). Moreover, Ebla recounts the discriminatory treatment meted to girls in her culture: "The idea that boys lift up the prestige of the family and keep the family's name alive. Even a moron-male cost twice as much as two women in terms of blood compensation. As many as twenty or thirty camels are allotted to each son. The women, however, have to wait until their fates give them a new status in life: the status of marriage" (Farah, 1970:3).

Besides, childrearing is principally a woman's role, but men also look into the training of their children, especially the boys. Okonkwo scolds Ezinma: "Sit like a woman!" And she automatically brings her two legs together in front of

her. However, it is wholly a woman's duty to bring up her daughter whose training is tailored towards marriage. In Nawal El Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero*, Firdaus' mother teaches her all her duties to the family, but she complains: "Was I going to spend my life sweeping the dung out from under the animals, carrying manure on my head, kneading dough, and baking bread?" (1975:16) A social scientist insists that the compatibility of women's roles with simultaneous childcare responsibilities is the most cogent reason that women's tasks are likely to be relatively close to home, not dangerous and interruptible (Brown, 1970).

In Africa, if a child consistently misbehaves, it is believed that there is dereliction of duty on the part of her mother. Okonkwo whose father is notorious for his laziness blames Nwoye's mother squarely for his incipient laziness. He says bitterly that "A chick that will grow into a cock can be spotted the very day it hatches. I have done my best to make Nwoye grow into a man, but there is too much of his mother in him" (Achebe, 1958:46). D.U. Opata stressing the importance of family relationship and organization in Igboland is of the opinion that Okonkwo's fear is understandable as he "contemplates the prospect of his son, Nwoye, turning Christian, and he Okonkwo, an ancestor having no person to revere him" (1998 : 31). In an attempt to make sure that her son grows up well, Laye's mother insists that girls of ill-repute must not set their foot into her house. Njoroge's mother also discourages him from interacting with Jacobo's daughter.

Moreover, Enitan's parents warn her to keep off the little wayward girl, Sheri.

The patriarchs assign the role of caring for the members of the family to the woman. And right from the time she is a toddler, she is made to understand that part of her work in life is caring for the family – her father's or her husband's own. As an unmarried girl, she cooks and serves those in her father's household; and as a married woman, she takes care of those in her husband's home. At the birth of her first baby, her motherly instinct and training guide her to appreciate that the fragile bundle depends on her for survival. Elderly and more experienced women around her also direct her on what to do. She willingly and readily denies herself a lot of things for the sake of her family. Enitan's mother resigns from her job as a chartered secretary to take care of her family. Also Niyi's mother resigns from hers as a qualified nurse to look after her family. The African cultural novelists have ignored her sacrifices and denials; however, younger writers recognize these attributes as exemplified in Hussaina's devotion to her new borne baby: "At the end of her maternity leave, she gave a one-month notice of her intention to resign from her job as a nurse at the Lusaka Hospital. She was going to devote all the time she had to bring up Sagiir, giving him the best motherly care she could for at least three years" (Gimba, 1986:115). In *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, Armah paints a discouraging, damning and gloomy picture of post-independent Ghana; a country

ridden with corruption, criminality, decadence, dishonesty and disillusionment; a nation without hope of redemption from its vices, with its pervading atmosphere of physical and spiritual aridity; yet, he succeeds in describing a touching image of a mother's love and devotion to her child amidst the societal rot.

Under a dying lamp a child is disturbed by a long cough coming from somewhere deep in the centre of the infant's body. At the end of it his mother calmly puts her mouth to the wet congested nostrils and sucks them free. The mess she lets fall gently by the roadside and with her bare foot she rubs it softly into the earth (35).

Efuru also spends eight months breast-feeding Ogonim until it is quite glaring that Adizua cannot manage her business. Wanjia, though emotionally traumatized by the parasites in her society nurses Munira, Abdullah and Karega. Also Leah, who finds herself in an apartheid-ridden, violent and inhuman society, is the pillar of support to her family. The reader is told that "Leah went and stood over Daddy, and then she bent and picked him up as one would pick up a child and carried him out of the room. Easily, with the strength of the strong" (Abrahams, 1946:82).

The woman undergoes a mental and physical trauma if any member of her family is sick. Ekwefi's trauma is loaded

in her short utterance while banging on Okonkwo's door, "Ezinma is dying", came her voice, and the tragedy and sorrow of her life were packed in those words"(53). Ihuoma has to sleep on the floor when Emenike is sick; and Efuru suffers a lot when Ogonim is sick. She is expected to look after the husband whether they are living together or not. Ramatoulaye rushes to hospital to see Modou who abandons her and her children for Binetou. She is ready to consult both medical and traditional doctors to ensure that he gets well. Her own sickness does not deter her from thinking of her family's welfare as their welfare is her priority. She is worried over their future, especially her children's, if they are still young. Ampoma readily accepts to die for her husband, but one thing agitates her mind on her sick bed: the fate of her children if her husband remarries after she joins her ancestors. She reasons: "Like two little goats. I am leaving them. I? Two little goats struggling on the faraway hillside. I see their eyes glowing in the dark; lonely. Oh my little boy! And you, my girl with breasts just budding. What hands will prepare you for your wedding?" (Sutherland, 1967:9)

However, the man is not idle when a member of his family is sick as the cultural novelists insist that caring for the sick member of a family is a shared responsibility. Okonkwo rushes into the bush; collects herbs and roots; boils them; and forces Ezinma to inhale the steam when she has malaria. Besides, he helps Okagbue to dig out her *iyiwa*.

Furthermore, in every African society before the white man set his foot on the shores of Africa, cooking is reserved exclusively for women. Okeke Onenyi's statement in the *Arrow of God* bears that out. Cooking is seen as the natural role of women. And men think "that the only jobs a woman can do are to cook, to make beds and spread their legs in the market of love" (Ngugi, 1982:218). And to the Bandas in Central Africa, a "married woman has duties from which she cannot escape. Preparing Batouala's meal was one of hers" (*Maran*, 1921:49). Niyi queries Enitan when she fails to serve his food, "Woman, what do you think I married you for?" (Atta, 2005 : 208) If she is unable to carry out this role, her marriage will definitely hit the rock. The following conversation between Enebiri and his friends reveals the seriousness which her society attaches to her inability to cook..."What will you do if you marry a woman who cannot cook?" One of the bachelors asked. "I shall send her back to her mother", another replied (Nwapa, 1966:126).

Every wise mother tries to avoid this type of catastrophic fate for her daughter; therefore, she is under her tutelage in the kitchen from when she is a toddler. Ezinma as a young girl helps her mother in the kitchen and by the time she is married, she has perfected her cooking. As a favoured daughter, she has to break her one lunar month stay in her suitor's house to prepare "... some food for her father as soon as news spread that the six men

would be released. She took it to him in his *Obi*" (140). Also Enitan's mother insists she must learn how to cook despite the fact the father wants her to be brought up as a liberated woman. A maiden may be sent to live with an older, more experienced woman to be trained in home management and cookery, but she ought to be a trusted woman with good reputation and impeccable character. For instance, Mary is a beautiful but spoilt girl who does not know how to do anything before she comes to live with Mrs. Zaccheus Kanu. She is brought to her because "a young promising trader from Ududonka had paid the bride price on her head and sent her to Madam for one year, for training in housewifery" (Ike, 1973: 140). Efuru also lives with Difu's mother and grows up with him. She goes back to her father's house when she is fifteen years old and after "she learnt cooking, baking and sewing from the doctor's mother" (Nwapa, 1966:96). She, in her turn, has to teach Ogea how to cook and keep a house since she is under her care.

In a polygamous family, the cooking arrangement depends on the man as the head of the family. He may decide that the cooking of his meals rotates amongst his various wives. This is the arrangement in Ezeulu's house. Also "Nwagbara's second wife was to feed him for that day and so Wonuma and her children sat down to eat up all that they had cooked" (Amadi, 1966:97). It, therefore, necessarily follows that whoever cooks the patriarch's meals shares his bed with him. But he may decide that

each wife cooks and serves him his meals everyday. This is the arrangement in Okonkwo's household for: "He uncovered his second's wife's dish and began to eat from it. Obiageli took the first dish and returned to her mother's hut. And then Nkechi came in bringing the third dish. Nkechi was the daughter of Okonkwo's third wife" (32).

Whoever it is her responsibility to feed the head of the family must do that on time since time is of essence in the preparation and serving of his meals. However, in some African ethnic groups, a menstruating woman cannot cook for any grown up man because she is considered unclean during that period. Achebe notes this aspect of his people's culture: "She [Ugoye] was particularly slack when as now, she was forbidden to cook for any grown man on account of her uncleanness" (1964:64). Also in Banda custom, no man can make love to a menstruating woman. The village gallant, Bissibi'ngui who has planned to make love to Batouala's wife is unhappy because she comes to him with a red cord around her forehead and uncombed hair for "she was sick with that illness common to women, every moon made by N'Gakoura" (Maran, 1921:104). She cannot also visit a medicine man during the period of her menstruation because her visit will weaken the potency of his medicine and his magical powers (Nwapa, 1966).

The fact that the woman has grown-up daughters does not discharge her from her duty of cooking for her husband; though, once in a while, she can delegate her responsibility to them. Laye recalls that his mother calls

the eldest of his sisters and tells her to look after the cooking of the evening meal before she leaves with the man who comes to solicit for her assistance (1954:59). Moreover, Enitan's mother and mother-in-law supervise the cooking of their families' meals, even when they have hired cooks.

Throughout the length and breadth of Africa in pre-colonial days, the job of cooking is strictly for women. Any man who cooks is abhorred and treated with ignominy. However, colonialism has changed this role. A Cameroonian artist writes: "Evina had been cook to the priests and had retired to Doum after he had lost his last tooth in the service of the white man" (Oyono, 1956:18). The story is the same in Kenya, as the African man has not recovered the loss of his manhood several years after independence. Njuguna despises his son's occupation in the city and describes it derogatorily to his listeners:

One went to work as a cook in the settled area. He was then detained and even after detention went back to work as a cook for the new African settlers. Imagine that: a big man able to use his hands cooking for others. The other three are in Nairobi (Ngugi, 1977:82).

The Igbo society is not an exception to the general rule that cooking is a woman's job in pre-colonial Africa. One of the reasons Ezeulu hates Nwodika's son, apart from the

fact that he comes from the quarter of Umuaro that challenges his authority, is that the gossip mill has it that he is the white man's cook. He dispels the rumour being peddled against him in his community and redeems his image before the old priest with this explanation: 'I know that some people at home have been spreading the story that I cook for the white man. Your brother does not even see the smoke from his fire. I just put things in order in his house' (1964:179). Audu also complains to Manu about his son's denigrating job: 'Don't talk to me about my son in the city. The city may be big but not my son. Like a woman he cooked for the big men in the city' (Alkali, 1984:49). Niyi resists being turned into a cook, even when the wife is pregnant, and when she is delivered of a baby (Atta, 2005).

In addition to the above job, a woman has the duty of fetching water and collecting firewood she will use for her cooking. Achebe harps on this role again and again in his novels. The story of Obika's whipping "was brought to Ezeulu's compound by Edego's wife who was returning from the bush with a bundle of firewood on her head" (1964:87). This social division of labour is also stressed in his earliest work, *Things Fall Apart*. The reader is told that Okonkwo and the boys are mending the compound walls while "the women had gone to the bush to collect firewood, and the little children to visit playmates in the neighbouring compounds" (39). There is no part of pre-colonial African society where this is not a woman's role.

In Guinea, the situation is the same for Laye narrates how his mother because of her totem draws water from the river, irrespective of the swarming presence of crocodiles (1954:62). In *Efuru* and *The Concubine*, on several occasions women were either fetching water or washing their clothes in their village streams or carrying firewood that a critic calls attention to that stereotyped image of the African woman: "Women come and go with mounds of foo-foo, pots of water, market baskets, fetching kola, being scolded and beaten before they disappear behind the huts of their compounds" (Okonkwo, 1975:36).

Furthermore, the woman is assigned the job of cleaning the house. She has to clean and beautify the compound walls and huts, which have been put up or mended by her husband or son or a male relation. Achebe examines her role of cleaning her private compound walls and huts during festivals: "The festival was now only three days away. Okonkwo's wives have scrubbed the walls and huts with red earth until they reflected light. They had then drawn pattern on them in white, yellow and dark green" (27). Flora Nwapa's heroine, Efuru, on several occasions is either cleaning her hut or washing cooking utensils. After Adizua's elopement and Ogonin's demise, in an effort to resettle back in the father's compound, Efuru cleans and decorates her room and her father's own. She scrubs her father's room and his *obi*, his *ofo*, his *chi* and others, which needed scrubbing. Her father's walking stick is not left out in the cleaning exercise (89). However, this

role has been delegated to servants in the contemporary African novel, as women can no longer cope with several household chores.

5.5 Social Division of Labour at the Public Level

Slave trade is one single catastrophe that depleted the population of Africa's able-bodied young men and women. The virile youth, the cream of Africa's future are hunted down and sold into slavery by their black brothers to assuage the insatiable and ghoulish demand for black workers in South American plantations. Apart from that, communities wage inter-tribal and intra-ethnic wars against their cantankerous and warlike neighbours or to prove their supremacy over others. Because of these incessant wars and slave hunts, the men have the responsibility of protecting their communities. Each community has its criteria for measuring a man's standing as reflected in the African novels. In Okonkwo's Umuofia, the number of human heads one had to his credit is material. Hence, when a daughter of Umuofia is killed in Mbaino, Okonkwo is sent as an emissary to it with an ultimatum to choose between war on one hand and giving them a maiden and a lad. Emecheta also shows that the Igbo society worships physical strength for she describes Nwokocho Agbadi thus: "He was taller than most and, since he was born in an age when physical prowess determined one's role in life, people naturally accepted him as a leader" (1979:10). The Bandas also have the same

yardstick for measuring who would be their leader. It is written that Batouala's "legendary strength was praised from one end of the Banda country to the other. His exploits be they in love or in war, his ability as a valiant hunter and his ardor became legends to be marveled at" (Maran, 1921:16). Also the collective responsibility of men to protect the entire community against external aggression is not lost on the Gikuyus. Nyakinya recounts her husband's story about how the Ilmorogians hide their wives and children in the caves to defend their land and livestock against the marauding colonialists:

He told me how he saw a thousand spear-blades of our warriors catch the afternoon sun and turn red like flames from a burning house... matching against the enemy. A thousand brave men walking to their death, mowed down by fire and noise from those sticks... but they fell on the enemy, screaming defiance, until the enemy was forced to flee... but on ground lay the flower of Ilmorog manhood... (Ngugi, 1977:23-24).

Besides, Chinua Achebe highlights this role in one of his cultural novels. The omniscient narrator says:

The war was waged from one Afo to the next. On the day it began Umuaro killed two men of Okperi. The next day was Nkwo, and so there was no

fighting. On the two following days, Eke and Oye, the fighting grew fierce. Umuaro killed four men and Okperi replied with three, one of the three being Akukalia's brother, Okoye (Achebe, 1964:28).

Two things are to be deduced from the above narration. One, there is an unwritten humanitarian law observed by the two warring villages. Nkwo market day is regarded or observed as a day of truce when there is no fighting. Two, women are not soldiers and are not killed in or outside the warfront. This second point is buttressed by Okonkwo's question after he killed Ikemefuna and has a guilty conscience. '... How can a man who has killed five men in battle fall to pieces because he added a boy to their number? Okonkwo you have become a woman indeed' (45). These observations have rendered the imperialists' assertions and presumptions that Africans are without culture, without civilization; a continent inhabited by cannibals; a land filled with primitive beings that lived on trees as mere ego-boosting fallacies.

The arduous job of the construction of roads, railways and bridges are assigned to the men. However, this arises as a result of the Westerners' intent for the maximum exploitation of the economic resources of the African continent. Africa, which Conrad derogatorily refers to as "heart of darkness", a "prehistoric earth", an "accursed inheritance", and an "unknown planet" (1995:65) has its virile population decimated in the white man's unbridled

quest for ivory. In order to get to every nook and cranny of the continent, he is forced to construct roads and railways for him to plunder and pillage its resources. Conrad's narrator, Marlow, describes the construction of the railway with the images of pestilential destruction of the natives:

A slight clinking behind me made me turn my head. Six black men arrived in a file, toiling up the earth. They walked erect and slow, balancing small baskets full of earth on their heads.... Another mine on the cliff went off, followed by a slight shudder of the soil under my feet. The work was going on. The work! And this was the place where some of the helpers had withdrawn to die. They were dying slowly – it was clear. They were not enemies, they were not criminals, they were nothing earthly now, - nothing but black shadows of disease and starvation, lying confusedly in the greenish gloom (pp. 43-44).

Besides, the symbolism of the road in Joyce Cary's *Mister Johnson* as one that heralds the destruction of traditional African values is not lost on a discerning reader. In fact, Rudbeck's great dream – the construction of a road through Fada is made possible through either black man's cheap or free labour. The narrator describes the effort of the black youths thus:

Rudbeck's road, the great, the glorious, the wonder of the world is about to be finished and I have helped to finish it.... But the road is not open.... The little group of hoe men, their naked bodies glistening with sweat, who stand under those enormous vaults in harsh gloom, are at home. They smile at the road, because they have made it and sung of it, but they have no idea of its beginning or end (1969:205-207).

This same gendered social division of labour is seen to be applicable in Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God*. The responsibility of the men to construct roads under the supervision of a white administrator is delineated in Achebe's fictional setting, Umuaro. The narrator observes: "It was the turn of the Otakagu age group to work on the new road on the day following the Festival of the Pumpkin Leaves. Ezeulu's second son, Obika, and his friend, Ofoedu, belonged to this group" (1964:77).

Again, it is the duty of men in most African ethnic groups to break kola-nuts and pour libations at social gatherings. D.U. Opata writes that in his culture, the presentation of kola-nuts to guests is a sure sign of goodwill and an indication of respect (1998:101). Offer of kola-nuts at public and private functions are also appreciated by other ethnic groups. Akinbode believes that "throughout Nigeria, kola-nuts are used as gifts and widely circulated on important occasions such as marriage,

funerals, child-naming or coronation. A gift of kola-nuts to Hausa women on the birth of a child is a mark of the highest honour" (1982:3). Enitan also presents kola-nuts to her father-in-law during her daughter's christening (p. 331). Because of the value placed on kola-nuts, Achebe presents several occasions in his cultural works, where they are broken and eaten as a sign of friendship. In Igbo land, the rejection of one's kola-nuts is a rejection of one's friendship. Ezeani rejects Okonkwo's friendship when he rejects the kola-nut he presents to him. He vehemently tells him: 'Take away your kola-nut. I shall not eat in the house of a man who has no respect for our gods and ancestors' (1958:21).

There are some cultures where women are prohibited from either breaking or sharing kola-nuts, whether at private or public functions. In that case, if the women are alone, and by chance a male child is there, he prays over the kola-nuts, breaks them for them and shares the pieces among them. It is immaterial whether he is a son to one of them or not. His age is also irrelevant. This is the reason why Enebiri warns Efurū: 'Don't talk abomination. That we are in the same age group does not mean we are the same age. Besides, I am a man and you cannot break kola in my presence' (Nwapa, 1966:85).

It is also the duty of men, like in the breaking of kola-nuts, to pour libations to their gods and ancestors. Before a man drinks any liquor, he ought to pour it on the ground and invite his god and ancestors to come and drink it and

protect him, his family and those around him. Achebe describes vividly this ancient rite in *Arrow of God*: “Ezeulu brought out his horn from the bag beside him and held it to Edogo to fill. When he had served him, he took the calabash to Akuebue and also filled his horn. Before they drank Ezeulu and Akuebue tipped a little on the floor and muttered barely audible invitation to their fathers” (97). The men can also pour libation to lift a curse or ask for blessing from the gods and ancestors. A Ghanaian playwright records this aspect of her culture. Ato’s uncle informs him: ‘We invoke our sacred dead to bring us blessings. Therefore, we are asking you to tell us what is wrong with you and your wife so that first we will wash her stomach with this, then pour the libation to ask the dead to come and remove the spirit of evil around you and pray them to bring you a child! (Aidoo, 1965:40)

The followers of traditional religions also offer food to their gods and ancestors before they eat. Kambili watches his grandfather as he molds “a lump of fufu with his fingers. I watched him, the smile on his face, the easy way he threw the molded morsel out towards the garden, where patched herbs swayed in the light breeze, asking Ani, the god of the land, to eat with him” (Adichie, 2004:65).

Besides, it is equally an unfounded assertion to say that Africans in pre-colonial era were atheists. This is because almost every African believes in one Supreme Being, which is called by different names in the multiplicity

of African languages. The Supreme Being has lesser gods on earth through which they serve him. The gods also have human representatives or messengers, who serve them and interpret their wishes to their worshippers. These human messengers are called priests. The chief priests of the powerful deities like Agbala, Igwekala, Ojukwu, Edo, Amadioha are usually men. They are feared and respected because of their esteemed positions like the priests in Christian religion and the Imams in Islamic religion. The chief priest of Ulu reminisces over his sphere of influence and authority in his community: "Whenever Ezeulu considered the immensity of his power over the year and crops, and therefore, over the people he wondered if it was real" (Achebe, 1964:3). Another literary artist also examines the veneration of Nwokekoro, the priest of Ojukwu: "He was friendly with everyone and was highly respected. His office as high priest of the most powerful god lent him great dignity" (Amadi, 1966:8). The Gikuyus also depend on their diviners a lot at different times in their history. They cannot do anything without consulting them. Their adoration and his unquestionable authority are to be discerned from Njuguna's report of the seer's solution to the long drought in Ilmorog:

We send this donkey away. We sacrifice a goat.
Nobody has the mouth to throw words back at
Mwathi. You know he is the stick and the shade that
God uses to defend our land. You know that since

that fight for Ilomorog a long time ago we have not had many plagues in our midst. Nobody can throw back words at him (Ngugi, 1977:114).

In the gendered social division of labour at the public level, women are also priestesses to deities, especially the goddesses. Their power and influence are incomparable to those of priests. The Oracles of the Hills and the Caves is a powerful deity that decrees that Ikemefuna must be sacrificed because of the locusts that invade Umuofia; yet, Okonkwo challenges its priestess when she comes to take Ezinma away. He tells her to come back in the morning as Ezinma is already asleep. He and Ekwefi surreptitiously follow her to the cave, when she ignores their advice and takes Ezinma away. Nwapa emphasizes in *Efuru* that their influence and power are not much. Efuru, as the priestess of Uhamiri, does not attract as much respect from her husband, mother-in-law and neighbours as the diviners. Omirima saucily summarizes her predicament. She blames her mother-in-law for allowing her to be a worshipper of Uhamiri while she is still childless. She argues tenaciously, 'Your daughter-in-law is a foolish woman to go into that. Amidi, you are to blame. Did you point that out to her? You are the mother, why didn't you point out this to her?' (1966:162) However, the power and veneration of these gods and their priests and priestesses have dwindled with the adventure of the Westerners into Africa. According to D.U. Opata, this is possible because "Some missionaries

saw themselves in the image of angels with flaming swords sent to destroy the evil and devilish practices of the inhabitants of the colonies" (2005:6).

Furthermore, in Africa it is only the men that wear masks. Masquerades are believed to be the spirits of the ancestors that participate in the activities of the living. In Igbo land, they are said to emerge from ant-hills. Every age grade owns a masquerade in a community. They are fortified with fetish objects so as not to be harmed by other masquerades, evil spirits and wicked people. Their functions range from entertainment, participation in funeral ceremonies and settlement of disputes. Matters they can adjudicate on range from matrimonial causes to land disputes. In *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe critically examines their unbiased role in the dispensation of justice and the maintenance of democratic institutions. 'We have heard both sides of the case', said Evil Forest. 'Our duty is not to blame this man or praise that, but to settle the dispute' (66).

Furthermore, they attend the funeral ceremonies of men only, but for the deceased to be qualified for their presence, he must be their member or somebody invited them. Also if the deceased is a warrior, a titled man, or very old, the ancient masquerades will honour him with their presence. Achebe paints vividly the funeral ceremony of late Ezeudu. A man who in his youth is a warrior; one of the oldest men in his clan; a man who has taken three titles; and a man blessed with many sons.

It was a warrior's funeral, and from morning till night warriors came and went in their age groups. They all wore smoked raffia skirts and their bodies were painted with chalk and charcoal. Now and again an ancestral spirit or *egwugwu* appeared from the underworld, speaking in a tremulous unearthly voice and completely covered in raffia (1958:85).

However, masquerades and initiation into the cult is no longer fashionable. They neither adjudicate on disputes nor are they a means of initiation into manhood as most Christians abhor the practice. Jaja is not initiated into the spirit world because the "only time Papa had talked about ima mmuo was to say that the Christians who let their sons do it were confused, that they would end up in hell fire" (p. 87).

Furthermore, the religions and customary practices of almost every African ethnic group in pre-colonial era are largely unwritten. They are buried in immemoriality in the minds of the people; thus, a man narrates events, which occurs decades or centuries before his birth by saying, 'My father told me'. It is generally believed that a man cannot willfully lie to his children. Men, therefore, are the custodians of those practices that cement their communities. Laye's father tells him that he is the custodian of the black snake that is the guiding spirit of their race (1954:17). Also Okonkwo willfully kills Ikemefuna despite Ezeudu's warning. However, he justifies

his action in a heated argument with Obierika: 'But someone had to do it. If we were all afraid of blood, it would not be done. And what do you think the Oracle would do?' (1958:46) Since the oracle decrees that the boy must die, Okonkwo has to obey the command of the oracle rather than the advice of a man.

In pursuit of this sacred role of custodianship of traditional values, it is a great sacrilege to destroy a man's personal symbol of worship. The victim will leave no stone unturned to avenge the desecration. The men of Umuaro sympathize with Eboh after their emissary violates his shrine and breaks his *ikenga*. They unanimously agree: 'Who would bear such a thing? What appropriation or sacrifice would atone for such sacrilege? How would the victim set about putting himself right again before his fathers unless he would say to them: Rest, for the man that did it has paid with his head? Nothing short of that would have been adequate' (Achebe, 1964:25).

Marriage is also regarded as a very important institution in every ethnic group. No father allows his son to deliberately back out from a pre-arranged marriage; stranding a girl betrothed to him from infancy. Wigwe advises his son, therefore, to abandon his new flame and marry Ahurole. He points out to Ekwueme the seriousness of such behavior: 'Everything is ready. We can't go back. I told you it is almost an abomination to break off an engagement like this. It is unheard of. No one will ever side with you' (Amadi, 1966:107). And if the man marries a

woman, everybody in his family is interested in their welfare. Any dispute between them is quickly settled. Ato's mother rebukes him for slapping his black American wife and she makes sure that they settle their differences.

The elderly men have the guardianship of the unwritten code of conduct in every profession in each African society, and the traditional medical practice is not an exception. Ezeulu points this out to Obika when he wants to know whether it is the practice for a medicine man to go home with the hen used for sacrifice instead of burying it with other items. Ezeulu tells him: "It is not the custom. You must know that there are more people with greedy, long throats in the pursuit of medicine than anywhere else" (1964:121).

African literary artists are of the opinion that violence in all forms - murder, manslaughter, assassination, rape, assault, and armed robbery – are unknown offences in pre-colonial Africa. The colonialists import unprecedented violence in Africa. Ngugi states: "They were called the lazy boys and people in the village said that such men would later turn to stealing and crime. This thought always made people shudder because murder in cold-blood was a foul thing. A man who murders was for ever a curse in heaven and earth" (1964:8). The Westerners' destruction of the people's values leaves them with conflicts. Also their conscription into the two world wars makes them witnesses to violence and bloodshed and they come back never to be the same again. To put salt to an injury, the

land, which they depend on are forcefully taken away from them and they become squatters in their ancestral heritage. As if these are not enough, there are unemployment and migration of people to the few urban areas, which result in the creation of slums and ghettos where violence thrives. The physically and psychologically alienated Africans have no option but this: "It was also the time of the fashion of the jackknife and chuke, the rapid unthinking movement of short, ugly iron points that fed wandering living ghosts with what they wanted, blood that would never put an end to their inner suffering" (Armah, 1968:65).

African societies, therefore, abhor all manners of killing – manslaughter and murder. They are both regarded as serious offences in which the offender must be punished. However, manslaughter is not as serious as murder because of the absence of a guilty mind, which exonerates the offender. In Igbo land, the punishment for manslaughter is seven years exile and the destruction of the offender's movable and immovable property. After the demolition of Okonkwo's property, Obierika wonders why a man will be punished for an offence he commits inadvertently. Nevertheless, he reasons: "They were merely cleansing the land, which Okonkwo polluted with the blood of a clansman" (Achebe, 1958:87).

In the novels of social criticism and in recent feminist novels, violence is the order of the day in almost all post-independent African countries, where the novels are set.

In *Purple Hibiscus*, the draconian military government eliminates its critics. In *Everything Good Will Come*, citizens are tortured and murdered. In *Faceless*, abandoned, street-children are murdered without any inquiries from the relevant government bodies. And in *The Noble Mistress*, soldiers shoot perceived enemies during and after military coups. They also unleash mayhem on defenseless civilians (Osanyin, 2001).

Men also protect the integrity of the masquerades. They exert punishment on any offender who unmasks them. It is regarded as an abomination to unmask an ancestral spirit. This is the reason the Christian converts come into open confrontation with their host community, when Enoch unmasks an *egwugwu*. Achebe describes the abomination thus:

That night the mother of the spirits walked the length and breadth of the clan, weeping for her murdered son. It was a terrible night. Not even the oldest man in Umuofia had ever heard such a strange and fearful sound, and it was never to be heard again. It seemed as if the very soul of the tribe wept for a great evil that was coming - its own death (132).

It is the responsibility of the women also to clean the public houses, even when they are for the exclusive use of the men. He goes on to describe the cleaning of the

egwugwu hut thus: “The *egwuegwu* house into which they emerged faced the forest, away from the crowd, who saw only its back with the many-coloured patterns and drawings drawn by specially chosen women at regular intervals. These women never saw the inside of the hut. No woman ever did” (1958:63). With the arrival of Christianity, it is the gendered role of the Christian women to sweep, clean and adorn the churches. The omniscient narrator says:

It was Wednesday in Holy Week and Mr Kiaga had asked the women to bring red earth and white chalk and water to scrub the church for Easter; and the women had formed themselves into three groups for this purpose. They set out early that morning, some of them with their water-pots to the stream, another group with hoes and baskets to the village red-earth pit, and the others to the chalk quarry.

5.6 Language & Literary Devices in Gendered Social Division of Labour in the African Novel

In the African novel under discussion, the representation of gendered social division of labour is presented in simple language with other stylistic devices. For example, in Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*, the novelist makes it clear that there is clearly demarcated division of labour in Okonkwo’s Umuofia during the pre-colonial society in

which the novel is set, and he uses overt references. Okonkwo pointedly refuses Ezinma's request to take his chair to the wrestling arena because, as he says, "No, that is a boy's job" (p.32). And to show his growing love for Ikemefuna, he allows him to take his chair and goat-skin bag to meetings as if he is one of his own sons. Besides, to show the positive influence which Ikemefuna has on Nwoye for three years he stays in Okonkwo's household, Okonkwo observes and appreciates that Nwoye's association with Ikemefuna yields a positive result. Nwoye does difficult and "masculine tasks" like splitting of firewood, or pounding food (p.37). The narrator makes it obvious that the boy's recreational time is spent with Okonkwo who tells them "masculine stories of violence and bloodshed" (p.37). This shows that in the domestic sphere, the head of the family must train his sons as they are expected to take over from him, if he is old or deceased.

However, Okonkwo is not lucky with his first son, Nwoye, whom he tries hard to turn into a very strong man who will be capable of running his household, and one of the successful men in Umuofia. Okonkwo regrets his son's laziness and the narrator wonders, "How could he have begotten a woman for a son?" (p. 108) The great warrior is haunted throughout his life by his father's weakness and improvidence. Achebe uses metaphor to describe the humiliation he undergoes as a little boy when a playmate calls his father, Unoka, *agbala*. He says, "That was how

Okonkwo first came to know that *agbala* was not only a name for a woman it could also mean a man who had taken no title" (Achebe, 1958). His father's ignoble life and death is a dark spot for him, and the novelist uses a proverb to show the young warrior's reaction to Nwakibe's story that Obiako refuses to sacrifice a goat for his late father. The narrator says, "Everybody laughed heartily except Okonkwo, who laughed uneasily because, as the saying goes, an old woman is always uneasy when dry bones are mentioned..." (p. 15).

Apart from Okonkwo's contempt for his father and son for their incapability to fulfill their gendered social roles in domestic and public spheres, Achebe uses irony when Okonkwo tells a man who contradicts him at a kindred meeting over discussion of an ancestral feast, "This meeting is for men" (p. 17). In other words, since the man has taken no title in the land, he regards him as a woman and therefore is not supposed to sit and discuss with them. Besides, Achebe uses another irony in Okonkwo's reflection of the inability of the Mbanta men-folk in defending their customs and values against the newly converted Christian miscreants. The warrior is disgusted with the rationalization of the desecration of their ancient customs of the sacredness of the pythons. He ruefully thinks of the clan where abominations will be left unchallenged, "This was a womanly clan" and "Such a thing could never happen in his fatherland Umuofia" (p. 113). There is also irony in Okonkwo's thought, because

what is happening at Mbanta also happens at Umuofia, when he beheads the head messenger, the men of Umuofia do not react as he expects them.

There is no doubt that from the very beginning of the story in *Things Fall Apart*, the reader is made to know that Okonkwo's clan Umuofia is one that admires physical prowess. This is a clan that is feared by its neighbours and has exclusive yardstick for the measurement of achievement, both in domestic and public spheres. A simile is used to describe Okonkwo's enviable position in the clan. The narrator says "... Okonkwo's fame had grown like a bush fire in the harmattan" (p. 3). There is also the imagery of great distance associated with this simile. In other words, Okonkwo's name is not only known throughout the length and breadth of Umuofia, but his name is known outside the clan. Achebe readily affirms this position with another proverb, "As the elders said if a child washes his hands he could eat with kings. Okonkwo had clearly washed his hands and so he ate with kings and elders".

Okonkwo believes that for a man to join the league of achievers in the clan is not merely by luck, he has to work for it. He sorrowfully reflects on Nwoye's effeminacy and the danger of the continuation of his genealogy, he queries Obierika, "Where are the young suckers that will grow when the old banana tree dies" (p. 45). He also uses a proverb to buttress his fear of what the future holds for Nwoye. He says, "A cock can be spotted the very day it

hatches" (p. 46). As Nwoye joins the Christians, Okonkwo is devastated because he is aware of the implications of his action to his entire family. Achebe uses metaphors to present the reminiscences of the ageing warrior while in exile. Okonkwo is popularly called a "roaring fire" (p. 108) and how a "living fire begets cold impotent ash" (p. 109). The two metaphors are loaded with contradictory images, while the first gives mental images of violence, intense heat and action; the second has the images of inactivity, docility and annihilation. In other words, Okonkwo who has worked himself into one of the greatest men of Umuofia will have sons who are nonentities.

Because the ageing warrior foresees the danger in the genealogy of his family, he sees it as a calamity. Achebe uses an overt language to show Okonkwo's regrets that Ezinma "should have been a boy" (p. 37). And also "Okonkwo never stopped regretting that Ezinma was a girl" (p. 112). This is understandable in a patriarchal society where there is social division of labour, which is gender-sensitive. Ezinma has Okonkwo's strength of character to be able to run his household; she understands his every mood; there is a bond of sympathy that cements the two; yet, Ezinma is still a girl. Therefore, Obiako finds it abominable that his mother is sweeping the frontage of Ezeulu's compound and queries her, "Do you sweep the *iruezi* nowadays?" (Achebe, 1964:125) Achebe also uses overt language to show that it is the duty of the womenfolk to pursue, drive back and collect ransom from

cow owners whose cows have been let loose on their neighbours' farmland in *Things Fall Apart*.

With the increase in participation of female novelists, there is an attempt to boost up the shattered image and the marginalized roles of women in the African novel. They also employ overt language to whittle down what they perceive as over-blown male social responsibilities in the domestic and public spheres. Flora Nwapa's description of her heroine in *Efuru* is modeled after Chinua Achebe's description of his tragic hero, Okonkwo. From the very beginning of the novel, she is described thus: "Efuru was her name. She was a remarkable woman. It was not only that she was from a distinguished family. She was distinguished herself. Her husband was not known and people wondered why she married him" (1966:7).

In the subsequent chapters of the novel, she paints a vivid picture of a woman who assumes the headship of her two husbands' families. Efuru feeds and clothes Adizua's family. Adizua cannot continue with her trading when she has her daughter because he is a very lazy man. When she leaves Adizua's house and marries her second husband, Enebiri, she also assumes the role of the head of the family. The narrator says that Efuru helps her husband to buy canoes, to rebuild his father's dilapidated house, and to build their own house in the new layout (p. 136). Also Nwabata narrates to Efuru and Ajanupu the husband's abandonment in providing security to his family. Not only is Nwosu incapable of feeding, clothing his family and

paying his own medical bills, but according to her in her own satiric remark: "I am the thief. He fooled around and went and sat down outside the gate. That's the man who is my husband. Women are nothing. He, my husband, was asleep when thieves came to the house. But I was only a woman. What can a woman do?" (p. 178).

The thrust of the feminist literature is directed at questioning the gendered social division of labour, where the man assumes the apex position in family and public life. This is also seen in Nnuego's ironical statement in Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* that "Nnaife is the head of our family. He owns me, just like the god in the sky owns us. So even though I pay the fees, yet he owns me. So in other words he pays" (p. 217). Emecheta here debunks the man's headship of the family, where the woman shoulders his burden. Also in Mariama Bâ's *So Long a Letter*, Ramatoulaye in her epistle to her childhood friend, Aissatou, complains of her husband's outright abandonment of the family and the subsequent abdication of his domestic duties to it. She says, "The last date of electricity bills and water rates demanded my attention. I was often the only woman on the queue" (p. 51). Apart from the simple and overt language to refer to her worrisome situation of being thrust with Modou's responsibilities to his family, she further underscores her predicament in a metaphorical language. She confides in Aissatou, "I no longer interested Modou and I knew it. I was abandoned: a fluttering leaf no hand dares to pick up

as my grandmother would have said" (p. 52). She directly compares herself to a "fluttering leaf" with its powerful imagery of abandonment, dejection, uselessness. In other words, since she is no longer as young, as beautiful, as fresh as she used to be when she is younger, Modou does not see her as being attractive again, and other men who would have wanted her dared not because of her husband, who is still alive. However, Sefi Atta's Enitan in *Everything Good Will Come* is not a traditional woman like Nnuego and Ramatoulaye; therefore, she is not as accommodating of the husband's dereliction of his domestic and public duties like the duo. The male characters in the novel are not comfortable with her radical views, which she expresses freely and her amazonic action. Niyi's male friends refer to her as a "feminist", because they fear her bad influence on their wives, whom she stops serving food on their husbands. Also Niyi's brothers refer to him as a woman "Liberationist", because she forces men to cook and serve food. Niyi is forced to remind her in a very simple and clear language of her primary duties in the house. He insists that he married her to cook for him (p. 208). Observing the strength of character in her, he tells her in a very plain language loaded with sarcasm, "You are not a domesticated woman" (p. 218). Unfortunately, Niyi who marries only one wife, Enitan, is disappointed at the unwomanly attributes she exhibits and he uses a simile to underscore his predicament before his domineering wife. He says

regrettably that at times he feels like “half a man.” This statement is very serious in a culture where a male’s manhood is slapped on him by his male relations, who insist that a male, including a male-child must speak and act like a man (p. 314). Enitan’s father molded in the stereotyped male image admires Peter Mukoro, whom he calls a ‘man’s man’ (p. 316). Enitan, however, recognizes the reversal of gendered roles in her family, where Niyi displays the qualities of effeminacy—either shrinks or keeps deadly silence in matters of domestic and public interests. While leaving his house, she is compelled to ask him without eliciting any reaction whatsoever, “What kind of woman are you?” (p. 336). In her rhetorical question, Sefi Atta packs the impact of abandonment of gendered social responsibilities. As Adizua’s mother, who uses an indirect comparison, puts it: “The son of a gorilla must dance like the gorilla” (p. 51). The simile becomes necessary as it dawns on the old woman that Adizua’s abandonment of his family has a similar pattern with Adizua’s father’s earlier behavior. In other words, to her chagrin, she realizes that her son is as irresponsible as her husband.

Another recurrent theme, apart from abandonment, which feminist novelists highlight, is the issue of motherhood. In the African culture as reflected in the male-authored cultural works, one of the essence of womanhood is motherhood. With overt language that has reference to this theme, the African female novelists

question the veracity of this straight-jacketed societal belief. Enitan's mother, a traditional woman, tells her daughter that "All women want children" (p. 27). The same theme of motherhood with its sub-theme of barrenness is also dealt with in Nwapa's *Efuru*. The woman is usually blamed for any infertility of the couple. As the village gossips put it in their exaggerated language in *Efuru* and Adizua's case, Adizua ought to marry another woman since "two men do not live together" (p. 24). Besides, Buchi Emecheta in her ironically entitled work, *The Joys of Motherhood*, debunks the value of a woman being placed on motherhood. One can see and feel the extent of the collapsed world of Nnuego who lost her first husband because of her barrenness and the subsequent death of a male-child she has for her second husband. The use of this hyperbole, "I am not a woman any more" (p. 62) underscores the pain and anguish she feels at the loss of her only child in a society that measures the value of a woman on how prolific she is in the production of children, particularly male children.

Another theme that comes under the fire and brimstone of the African female writers is the gendered social division of labour. Enitan's father, though described in the novel as a modern man, has this conservative idea that a woman's training ought to be tailored to her future social responsibilities. He informs her in a very simple language without mincing words that a woman should have more comportment when she is going outside her

home (p. 132). Despite her father's intention to confine her to her tailored down roles as a woman, Enitan radically insists to her friend, Sheri, in a male-dominated society where "Women are not presidents" that she wants to be one to break the taboo(p. 34).

Nevertheless, in some of the novels of social criticism, there is indeed the abdication of gendered social division of labour by both male and female characters .In some of them the rape of the woman is symbolic with the rape of the countries, where the novels are set. The woman's body, therefore, becomes a site of encounter for rapacious and soulless men. In Nawal EL Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero*, the courageous tragic heroine, Firdaus, insists, "I am not a prostitute. But right from my early days my father, my uncle, my husband ,all of them ,taught me to grow up as a prostitute" (p. 99). And in tearing the three thousand pounds she earns from her prostituting trade, she says in a very overt language the way she feels:

It was as though I was destroying all the money I had ever held, my father's piastre, my uncle's piastre, all the piastres I had ever known, one after the other in a row: my uncle, my husband, my father... removing every trace their piastres had left on my fingers, tearing them away the very flesh of my fingers to leave nothing but bone, ensuring that not a single vestige of these men would remain at all (p. 98).

The radical Nigerian novelist, Festus Iyayi, in *Violence* agrees that there is indeed a reversal of roles in a country where the leaders milk the led. It is an unnatural situation where the woman performs the role of the man as the head of the family. Adisa, who is unemployed, has no choice than to succumb to Obofun's sexual advances in order to pay the husband's hospital bills. Iyayi uses a simile to describe the adulterous experience, "Obofun weighed down heavily on her and her fight was nothing but the last spasmodic movement of a dying animal" (pp. 169-170). Indeed, this simile is loaded with the imagery of violence and submission. In other words, the novelist describes the sexual experience as a rape and the woman submits to a force that is greater than herself. This position is reinforced with Adisa's sadness after the adulterous act with another simile. The narrator says, "...her eyes were dry but her face was taut and sad, like one who had lost a child" (p. 171). Her sense of sorrow, shame and guilty conscience as she goes to pay Idemudia's hospital bills is also depicted with a simile. She is described to be "like a thief who had stolen for the first time and is afraid he will be found out" (p. 222). Idemudia's anger at finding out that Adisa commits adultery with Obofun is described with a simile again. It is said, "Suddenly his heart was like a thatched roof on fire with dry harmattan wind blowing" (p. 301). This simile is also associated with the images of great violence and destruction. Similarly, another indirect comparison associated with the mental impression of

violence and destruction is used in the description of a woman's predicament as the victim of the man's venomous rage. As Idemudia rushes back to their one-roomed apartment, "He towered above her [Adisa], lying as she did on the bed, head raised like a snake" (p. 300).

Moreover, the narrator in Bode Osanyin's *The Noble Mistress* describes Jojolo's mother's abdication of her maternal responsibilities to her only daughter in a man-eat-man polygamous family thus: "My mother was gone. Gone. She disappeared like early morning dew in the presence of the rising sun" (p. 26). The use of this simile with its imagery of suddenness and temporariness will leave an indelible mark on Jojolo's psyche. The vacuum she leaves in her daughter's life is never filled, and it directs her every action and reaction. Also Iyayi, looking at the consequence of the abdication of parental responsibilities, uses Obofun's family as a site of such reversal of roles. One of Mrs. Obofun's male-friends describes his experience in this manner, "...her children fought around us. There was such an uproar, such a commotion" (p. 34). The words "fought", "uproar" and "commotion" depict images of violence, disorderliness and anarchy.

5.7 Conclusion

African societies have seen the wisdom in social division of labour based on the gender of the individual for the cohesion, well-being, survival and continuity of their

societies. And this highly gender-sensitive social division of labour is reflected in the African novel. Each member of the society is tacitly assigned roles, which he is expected to discharge without grudges. And those that cannot fulfill their allotted responsibilities are treated with contempt. Over countless centuries, men and women have been carrying out their duties without any friction in their relationship as each child born into a family is brought up to know his roles, to appreciate them, and to discharge them effectively for the corporate existence of his family and society. And each has been contented with his roles at the family and societal levels before the white man's civilization is forced down their throats. For Lawnio praises her people's rich culture thus:

Ocol, my old friend,
The ways of your ancestors
Are good,
Their customs are solid
And not hollow
They are not thin, not easily breakable
They cannot be blown away
By the winds
Because their root reach deep
into the soil (41).

However, in the feminist novels, the women feel that the men are not doing enough for the family. For

example, Amma Darko's heroine, Kabria, is torn between her role as a mother, a wife and a worker and feels that while the icing is on the cake, her husband needed to do more than simply be her regular husband, and she was in a perpetual quandary (pp. 34-35). Enitan also feels the same way and decides to park out from the house for Niyi. And this situation is possible because the "Fundamental problem that seems to face the contemporary African fictional heroine is that she is torn between two antagonistic identities: herself as an African, and her feminist aspiration for autonomy and self-realization as a woman (Frank, 1984:45).

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Chapter 6

The Prison World of the Nigerian Woman: An Aspect of Gender Silences in Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come*.

6.0 Introduction

Speak me to all barren women, she admonished as I strained my ears to hear her faint and dwindling voice. Speak me to all mothers who have only one child in a land and among a people where the value of a woman depends upon her capacity to fill her husband's house with children. Speak to me all women who have a daughter as an only child Speak me to all women who forfeited the love and respect of their husbands because they could not fill the dreams of multiple sons to inherit the men when they have joined the ancestors - ... Speak me to all women who after one daughter, laboured in vain to reverse the misfortune of a womb, dried up in the early hours of creation (Emenyonu, 1991:1).

The status of womanhood in Africa and in Nigeria, in particular, has been discussed in a number of ways to emphasize the discrimination, gender inequalities, injustice, degradation, humiliation and dehumanization that women reel under. This dying lamentation from Emenyonu's *Tales of our Motherhood* underscores the female situation in Nigeria. This paper takes the analogy a

step further as the status of womanhood in the country is looked at from the context of a prison. Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come* is used for critical illustration. Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* is a pacesetter in debunking the marginalized role and whittled down image of the Nigerian woman in Nigerian male-authored works. And a swipe is taken at the cultural concept of motherhood in the irony-coded novel, *The Joys of Motherhood*. It dawns on the female character, Nnuego, with her several children as she lives and dies a lonely life, that motherhood is a myth and a ploy that gags the freedom of the Nigerian woman (Emecheta, 1980). But in the opinion of a Nigerian poet: "The fruit that was eaten in the Garden of Eden was one of the unfortunate ones. The woman wanted to be like God, not the woman she was." (Okoro, 2006:x)

Evidently, after four decades of feminist writings, the Nigerian woman has made a giant stride in her socio-political and economic standing in her society. She has gone beyond the time when her birth was neither recorded nor celebrated nor was she educated (Emecheta, 1974). Nevertheless, the new millenium literary artists, like Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Sefi Atta, view her as still reeling under the heavy yoke of dictatorial men, which they parallel with state dictators that brutalize and impoverish the nation and its people.

In Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come*, the author points out that despite the constitutionally guaranteed rights of the Nigerian woman, she is under the burden of

obnoxious native laws and customs that are flagrantly used to violate her rights. She presents a kaleidoscopic view of her relationships in her family, her place of work, at school, in offices, the state and her religion. She still lives in a world where she is caged and Sefi draws a nexus between the state and family dictatorship. Unlike Nnuego, Enitan believes that true freedom can only come when both men and women discard the webs of silences that ensnare them by raising their voices to be heard in protest and by making sensible choices.

6.1 Summary of the Novel

The story has its setting in Lagos within the time frame of Nigeria's dictatorial military and corrupt civilian governments. Atta, like Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie in her *Purple Hibiscus*, uses the first point of view of a dynamic character to narrate the story of the prison world of the Nigerian woman and how her protest gains her freedom. Enitan starts the story from the time she is only seven years old. At that tender age, she sees events, people, situations and actions naively but as she grows up, she puts and interprets them in their proper perspectives. She lives with her middle class parents in Lagos. She describes the women's lives as a prison with its dos and don'ts and the constant bickering between her parents. She also looks at her life in various educational institutions as another type of incarceration. As she graduates, she works with her father in his office and at the bank, which she also

sees as another form of imprisonment. Furthermore, she describes the state as a wider prison, which detains people without trial for being critical of the acts and omissions of the governments. Her father is detained and as she goes in search of him, she discovers the horror that female detainees go through in state prisons. She joins a group of women that protests the incarceration of citizens. Her father and other prisoners are released as they mount pressure on the government. And he promises to narrate to her his traumatic experiences in prison. The novel ends with Enitan's joy for the men's discovery of what it means to be in prison.

6.2 The Nigerian Woman in her Home Prison

Sefi Atta shows through the narrator the burden of the Nigerian woman and what her societal tradition expects of her in the training of her daughters. From the very beginning of the novel, Enitan's mother cooks the family meals and wants her daughter to understudy her, because their custom frowns at any woman who cannot cook for her husband. She is a conservative, whom Enitan's father calls a "kitchen martyr", and he intends that her daughter should be brought up as a liberated woman. However, as she grows up, she sees the wisdom in her mother's insistence as every woman – wife or mistress – cooks for the man in her life. In far away England, girlfriends cook for their boyfriends. Sheri cooks for her brigadier man-friend, who runs around collecting young girls. Niyi also

tells her that despite her education, she is not a “domesticated woman”, because she finds it difficult to run her home. Sheri advises her that no matter her educational qualifications and her level of liberation, she cannot escape from her traditional role as a woman.

Polygamy is another cultural practice that humiliates the Nigerian woman and brings her heartache in her incarceration. The petty jealousies, the viciousness, the intrigues, and the power play in polygamous homes are not left out. Enitan says that apart from her maternal grandfather taking her grandmother’s savings to marry a new wife, which results in her own mother’s aloofness, her own father’s reaction to the wife stems from his insidious experience as a boy from a polygamous home. She says, “That was why he didn’t eat much; that was why he never gave in to my mother’s food threats; that was why years later, he still preferred to have an old man in his kitchen.” (2005: 154)

Because all the characters in the novel live in a culture that tolerates and eulogizes polygamy, a man can marry as many women as he wishes. Bakare marries two women that look alike. Peter Mukoro, an acclaimed political activist, does not recognize his monogamous marriage under the civil law. Her father likes and admires Mukoro's boldness and calls him a 'man's man'. Niyi also refers to his own monogamous status as a sign of weakness. “These men”, he said, “I don’t know how they do it. I didn’t

choose to have two families and most days I feel like half a man". (p. 315)

Enitan, however, prefers the men who go straight for polygamy to the ones that keep mistresses outside and procreate through them without the knowledge of their families. She is greatly disappointed with the father's choice of having children outside without his family's knowledge, though his staff and friends are fully aware of this.

Moreover, Atta criticizes the customary dictation that motherhood must be the natural and biological quest of every woman. And this has always been a recurrent theme in every feminist work. If a woman fails to give her husband a child after several months of marriage, he is encouraged to take on more wives. Enitan's mother loses her husband to other women, because of her inability to give him an heir. A priest puts the situation in its proper perspective:

In his [Abraham's] culture, bearing children was seen as normal way of life. And as we have seen in the law of inheritance, having an heir in the family is the most cherished prayer a man could say. But as mentioned earlier the heir could be the first son or any of the sons in case of an evolutionary son (Chidili, 2005:205).

Enitan's father has to procreate outside in order to have a son who can perpetuate his name and inherit his property. And her parents appreciate this and are worried when in her thirties, she is still unable to bear any child. The mother wants her to follow her to her church for vigils while the father suggests she goes abroad for a thorough medical examination. She experiences unsurpassable joy at the birth of Yimika that she describes her as: "Like a pearl. I could have licked her!" (p. 323)

The agony of a barren woman is indescribable. This is demonstrated in the symbolic character, Sheri. From the very first time she appears in the novel as an eleven-year-old girl, she has been associated with flowers, and later she is described as a 'scarlet hibiscus' that attracts insects that destroy it. Sheri's beauty attracts the three boys who raped her, and her attempt to abort the unwanted pregnancy, results in her barrenness. Her father dispossesses her of her natural mother, and the three errant boys, of her virginity and motherhood. Beneath her flamboyant life style, Enitan thinks of her friend's fatal fate: "Better to be ugly, to be crippled, to be a thief even, than to be barren.... Marriage would immediately wipe out a sluttish past, but angel or not, a woman had to have a child" (p. 106). But Sefi Atta, like Flora Nwapa in *Efuru* and *One is Enough*, believes that barrenness does not tantamount to the end of a woman. Sheri takes other projects – catering and running an orphanage, instead of

brooding over her situation. These give her independence and tremendous joy.

Besides, Atta also takes a swipe at the lack of love in male-female relationship in Nigeria. She presents the marriages in the novel as prisons where the women endure their imprisonment. Enitan believes that Nigerian men generally do not love their women – girlfriends and wives – though they may love their mothers and sisters and strive to protect them. The first stirring of adolescent love Enitan has for Damola is unrequited. While she fantasizes over him, he prefers Sheri to her. She also dates two men in England whose actions never show them as lovers. The first man she loses her virginity to tells her that she is frigid and as dead in bed as other Nigerian women. He doesn't bother to find out the cause of her frigidity, which is a result of her ingrained memory of Sheri's rape and a custom that demands that a woman should not be seen to enjoy sex. Springfellow lies to her she is his only girlfriend despite the fact he has others. Her heartthrob, Mike Obi, also dates a younger woman. Sheri's brigadier does not express love whatsoever for her.

The married woman is not spared the ugly experience. It is only during courtship that she has any semblance of love from the fiancé. After marriage, she is dumped in the house and the man goes out in search of new conquests. Enitan's father is always out of the house attending 'conferences'. There is no sign that other married men in the novel love their wives. Niyi claims that he loves Enitan

and the highest affection he shows her is that they hold hands together when they sleep, if they are not quarrelling. Enitan's father showers her with gifts and affection that the mother complains that he pampers her while she idolizes him. As the narrator grows up, she sadly recollects: "At what age was a woman supposed to be celibate? No one ever said. If they caressed themselves, the pleasure they got, they would never say. The thought made me wince. I was twenty when I first saw my father kiss a woman. He did it properly; the way they did it in films. He circled her waist with one hand, bent his knees, straightened up ... I had never seen my mother kiss a man, not even my father" (p. 294). Despite the lack of love from their husbands, Enitan says that women are more steadfast in their relationship with men. Clara remembers the sacrifice Peter Mukoro made to ensure she gets a university education after she elopes with him. She joins the women group that petitions the government to release their relations. Enitan's mother's bitterness and resentment of her husband does not deter her from telling her to apologize to her father for calling him a 'liar', because in Yoruba culture, it is a taboo. However, she admonishes her from her own wealth of experiences in marital life that she should: "Never make sacrifices for a man. By the time you say, look what I've done for you, it is too late. They never remember. And the day you begin to retaliate, they never forget." (p. 177)

Atta x-rays the widowhood practices that truncate and dehumanize widows and their children, particularly if they are young. She uses the testimony of *Mother of Prison* to explore this theme. She claims that despite the sacrifices she made for the family, she is not spared the brutality of widowhood. Within twenty-four hours of the man's death, her serene world crashes on her. Her hair is shaved off; she cannot touch her twins; she is forced to stay in a room alone, and she is told to drink the water used in bathing his corpse to prove her innocence that she did not cast any spell on him. Her refusal to do so results in her tragedy.

Also the traditional system of inheritance that disinherits women – daughters and wives – despite constitutional provisions comes under serious condemnation. The constitution guarantees every citizen's right to own a property. However, the Nigerian court shirks from enforcing these guaranteed rights. It divides a deceased's estate according to whether he lived the traditional or civil way. For instance, when Bakare dies intestate, his brother inherits his property according to the Yoruba custom while he has wives, daughters and sons that survived him. Enitan views the unjust native law and custom thus:

Sometimes, a widow couldn't inherit land at all. Even with the progressive customs, widows inherited according to how many children they

had, and sons could have double the rights of daughters (p. 142).

Almost every African culture cherishes the boy-child above the girl-child as the son perpetuates the family name. And apart from the psychological vacuum in men if they don't have sons, they also marry second wives to avoid the indignities their families may be subjected to after their demise. In the Igbo culture, for instance, and in extreme cases, where a man does not have an heir, one of her daughters may be kept in the house to continue the genealogy of the man. She procreates after the traditional rites have been performed. This usually happens if the man loves the wife and does not want to inconvenience her with the presence of a second wife.

It was Aziagba who solved the problem and saved all of us from slow death. She was willing to remain at home with us to produce male children for her father. After we had performed the *nluikwa* ceremony, she chose Okonji as a mate. And he was willing to enter the relationship with her. It was a big relief to all of us (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 1996:33).

It is in the light of this cultural demand that Sunny intends to bring his son, Debayo, to meet her daughter. He wants him to be identified as part of his family. However, his having children outside his marriage does not deter him

from loving Enitan. His act is within the Yoruba culture to have an ideal untainted line of inheritance, though this may be to the chagrin of his family.

Again, Atta scrutinizes the divorce dilemma of the Nigerian woman. A woman that has a job resigns after marriage or at the birth of her first baby to take care of the family. From that point on, she becomes economically dependent on the husband. If she decides to quit the marriage, her custom and the Nigerian court do not recognize that she is entitled to a fair share of the man's assets. Enitan's mother is a chartered secretary before her marriage. She resigns to take care of the family. After several years, she quits it and petitions the court for the dissolution of the marriage. Out of the man's vast wealth, he is only willing to part with a duplex. And he finds it difficult to transfer the ownership of the house to her. The court does not recognize the supreme sacrifice she made for the comfort of the family. She is deprived of her daughter and she dies a recluse. Enitan recounts the cause of her death:

My mother had been dead a day. Going through her medicines later, I discovered a batch which appeared to have been re-dated. I did not know where she'd purchased them, or how long they had expired. I imagined she'd bought them because they were cheaper (p. 321).

6.3 The Nigerian Woman in her School Prison

The novelist directs her searchlight on the unfair treatment of the Nigerian girl in educational institutions at all levels. Enitan discovers that though Mike Obi's primary school is ill-equipped, a teenage girl is being brutally flogged by a male teacher, leaving her with tear-stained, reddish eyes and welts on the back of her legs. The children are crowded into tiny classrooms; they hawk wares in streets and motor parks after school. She describes the pathetic situation of the African child in this manner:

The parents beat them out of love Teachers beat, neighbours beat. By the time the child turned ten, the adults they knew would have beaten out any cockiness that would develop into wit; any dreaminess that would give birth to creation, any bossiness that could lead to leadership. Only the strong would survive; the rest would spend their lives searching for initiative. This was what it takes to raise an African child, a village of beaters,... (p. 135).

Her post-primary school education at Royal College is not different from the primary school. Her father wants her to grow up a liberated woman; yet, he sends her to a secondary school that is exclusively for girls so that she does not grow up like a 'street girl without a home'. She

vividly captures the hardship, the mosquito-infested environment and dirty toilets. It is a school where female teachers chaperon them; and their letters are opened and read before they are given to them. Nevertheless, she prefers the school to her home. Intrigues and bickering in homes have driven Nigerian youths to the street. Jojolo says, "For me home was where I found myself. The sky was enough roof for me" (Osanyin, 2000:35). Like Jojolo, Enitan is happy to leave the prison that is her home, but she also discovers that the school is another prison in disguise. She derogatorily describes it:

The structure of our blocks, three adjacent buildings, each three floors high with long balconies, made me imagine I was living in prison. Walking those balconies, I'd discovered they weren't straight. Some parts dipped and other parts rose a little and whenever I was anxious because of an examination or punishment, I dreamed they had turned to waves and I was trying to ride them. Sometimes, I'd fall off the balconies in my dreams, fall, and never reach the bottom (p. 55).

After her long sojourn in England, she comes back to Nigeria for a year's study at the Nigerian Law School, Lagos. She finds out that the Nigerian woman is not given her basic freedom, even as a graduate. She says that the authorities are not interested in the improvement of the

environment and provision of facilities but to fetter the girls. She describes the Baba that guards the gates of female students as “the... keeper of graduate vaginas.” (p. 88). She describes the bribery and corruption that thrive in the school. And she draws attention to the lack of distinction between the primary, Royal College and the Nigerian Law School. As far as she is concerned, the graduate school is another prison for young women. She says, “Walking up the stairs, I smelt urine from the toilets and remembered my old school in Lagos.... The dormitory was like a prison cell: two iron spring beds and four walls sullied by the handprints and head smears of previous inmates”. (p. 88)

6.4 The Nigerian Woman in her Office Prison

Atta also highlights her ill treatment in her places of work. Her society expects her to resign from her job to take care of her family. At that point, she loses her economic independence. But if she feels that the man’s earning cannot maintain the family, she continues to work, but she may end up being the family’s breadwinner. And she has to do that discretely in order not to tarnish the man’s ego. The Mother of Prison tells them: “Everything in that house I bought, and I was sending money to my parents in the village, sending money to his parents”. (p. 281) However, the wealthy men stop their mistresses or wives from working and provide for them. Sheri’s brigadier wants her to stay indoors and not work. And when she opens up an

eatery, he insists she must close it. Her refusal to do as he ordered terminates the relationship after a fight. Sheri's stepmothers are also locked up in their purdah, always cooking for the family. Enitan's mother resigns as a secretary to take care of the home. And when she decides to punish her husband by denying him food, she doesn't succeed because the man threatens her with withholding the feeding money. Niyi's mother is also at home, a trained nurse, cooking for her family that one may mistake her for an illiterate woman that does not understand the rudiments of her family members' legal profession. Sheri summarizes this economic-dependence syndrome to Enitan: "The man is jealous of me. Can you believe it? He is jealous of my success. With all he has. He wants me to have nothing, except what he gives me. He says he will take it back. I said take it! All of it ! I did not come to this place naked." (p. 175)

A woman that is employed in a private company may end up being paid a stipend. This is because the man, whether husband, father or employer – wants to have a hold on her. Enitan's father buys her a car she can drive around the city with, but desists from paying her well. She is paid poor wages and salaries like other employees in his chambers.

Enitan says that the experiences of the Nigerian woman in public office is not better than when she works at home or works for a private person. Enitan finds out the harrowing trauma that awaits her: colleagues push her

around, and the bosses sexually harass her if she is attractive. She either resigns from her job or she is sacked if she is pregnant and cannot cope with the rigours of her job. And it dawns on her that men – whether as colleagues, or employers – refuse vehemently to discuss certain issues with women. Her father-in-law keeps silent as a sign of displeasure when she challenges him professionally on a point of law. Her father cannot listen to her when she raises the issues of increment in the salaries and allowances of his staff and the signing of the documents that transfer the ownership of a duplex to the mother. The climax of the situation is seen in Dagogo and Alabi's preferential treatment of Debayo. She narrates of her colleagues' gender-sensitivity in their warm reception and solidarity for him.

My brother knew everyone in the office. He gave Dagogo and Alabi a manly handshake, before he left *Man mi*, they called him. When I returned to the office I asked Alabi, you know my brother this well? Alabi nodded. He's our paddy. Our paddy-man, Dagogo said (p. 291).

6.5 The Nigerian Woman in her Religious Prison

The novelist also examines the role of religious institutions in her imprisonment. It is through Enitan that the reader glimpses into the exploitative role of Christian and Islamic religions. Islamic injunction is that a Muslim man may

marry up to four wives. Bakare and Ibrahim have two wives each that stay in purdah in their compounds. Ibrahim is a strict Muslim that does not talk to women; he insists that his wives and mistress must cover their heads when they go out, which is very sparingly; he also insists his daughters must remain virgins until they go into their arranged marriages. Ironically, though he is a strict Moslem, he collects girls as young as his own daughters. Enitan describes the relationship in the strict Moslem's household as being incestuous to her. Meanwhile, his daughters' closeness to Sheri is because she does not report them to their father, whenever they visit their boyfriends. Also Sheri's younger stepmother has a boyfriend even in her sheltered life.

Also Christianity, as practised by the Nigerian followers, leaves a lot to be desired. Enitan as a naïve narrator describes these Christians but beneath that description, the reader sees that they are hypocrites that masquerade as martyrs.

Holy people had to be unhappy or strict, or a mixture of both, I'd decided. My mother and her church friends, their priest with his expression as if he was sniffing something bad. There wasn't a choir mistress I'd seen with a friendly face, and even in our old Anglican church people had generally looked miserable as they prayed (p. 23).

Her mother wears long white gown to her church and gives the impression she has forsaken material things for the heavenly race. But beneath her outward show of purity lies a hard and unforgiving spirit. The members of her Pentecostal church believe that with their little faith that cannot move a mustard seed, they can heave a mountain. Enitan's mother takes the sick son, Arin, to the church for prayers during his sickle cell anaemia crisis, instead of taking him to the hospital. They also believe that their adolescent, errant children are possessed by demons and these will be exorcised if they drink spirogyra - filled water, which the pastor deceives them to be holy, healing water. They always burn incense and candles, and cast away imaginary evil spirits, which reside in their neurotic psyche. Their pastor's *modus operandi* is to prey on their neurotic fear of evil spirits, armed robbery, barrenness, death, disease and other dastardly visitations. And with his false and damnable prophecies, he fleeces them off their money and livestock.

Enitan sees Nigerians as religious but ungodly people; a people who are critical but lack self-introspection. Her mother criticizes the members of her church who complain about her dwindling tithes to the church. A woman who stays in her church more than she stays at home, but works assiduously to disbar the husband after their divorce. A people who pray fervently that their daughters will marry into good families; yet, they don't strive to make theirs good. Her father disapproves of her

marriage to Niyi because he is a divorced Catholic. Meanwhile, he forgets he has a concubine and children outside his marriage; he is also a divorced or separated Catholic. These two actions are also against Christian tenets and Catholic doctrines. Her mother objects to the marriage because, according to her, madness runs in Niyi's family. One of the aunts is a recluse, but she forgets she is also a recluse. As a growing up child, she innocently describes a scene in front of her mother's Pentecostal church, which to the mature reader is the highest point of hypocritical and uncharitable attitudes of the religious. The Good Samaritan's attitude to the neighbour underscores every religious faith, and this is breached in the eleven-year-old girl's account.

One half-eaten mango on the tree caught my eye. Birds must have nibbled it and now ants are finishing it up. The way they scrambled over the orange flesh reminded me of a beggar I'd seen outside my mother's church, except that his sore was pink and pus oozed out. No one would go near him, not even to give him money which they threw on a dirty potato sack before him (pp. 30-31).

6.6 The Nigerian Woman in the State Prison

Sefi Atta, like Adichie in her *Purple Hibiscus*, draws a parallel between the home and state dictators. Both of them intimidate, subjugate, humiliate, maim and destroy

the people entrusted to their care. While the 'mini Idi Amin' in the house brutalize his family, the state dictator mangles the soul and body of the populace. Kambili, the naive narrator in *Purple Hibiscus*, observes: "In later weeks, when Kevin drove past Ogui Road, there were soldiers at the roadblock near the market, walking around, caressing their long guns." (Adichie, 2004:28)

Atta in *Everything Good Will Come* paints an unsavoury portrait of a state that is on the brink of extinction, because of the deadly stranglehold of irresponsible leadership. Nigeria has been consistently reduced to a beggarly nation despite its abundant natural resources. A historian casts aspersion on the country's oligarchy:

The Nigerian elite class is not creative. It has its soul in London and New York, while its anus creates havoc in Lagos. It steals the wealth of the nation and transforms it into nothing. By serving foreign interests, our elite class has ensured that Nigerians will remain unable to manage their affairs in the future, thus perpetuating poverty despite the incredible richness of the land (Taylor, 1990:155).

In the novel, Enitan narrates the sad story of a people that have been burdened by parasitic leaders. Leaders in Chris L. Wanjala's opinion include "... ministers or heads of state whom one cannot write home about and who do not

qualify to transact business matters on behalf of their people.” (2005:12) Enitan sees the state as a prison and describes vividly scenes of violent crimes – rape, execution, prostitution, fraud, armed robbery – that the reader is suffused with haunting memories of these crimes, the perpetrators and victims. It is etched indelibly in his mind that Nigeria is a state where the citizens’ guaranteed rights are flagrantly violated with impunity; a state that is run with military decrees and edicts that sack the legislature, abrogate the constitution and oust the jurisdiction of courts; a state where infrastructures are not maintained; a state that is always associated with images of darkness; a state where the citizens have been reduced to stealing, begging, hawking or prostituting; a populace who have been cowed into silence. A people that have witnessed incessant bloody military coups and military men jostle and topple each other in their scramble to loot the wealth of the nation. Enitan describes its devastation in these concrete images that leave the reader shuddering and wondering at the fate of such a nation and its people. A man-made disaster that is worse than natural ones.

Drought, famine and disease. There was no greater disaster on our continent than the few who had control over our resources: oil, diamonds human beings. They would sell anyone to buyers overseas (p. 302).

Atta does not leave out the relationship between Nigerians abroad and their former colonial mistress. Enitan finds out while studying in England that the colour barrier between the two races is still a reality. Her school mates snob her and make jests of her colour; she is ignored in the office as if she does not exist. While African writers romanticize about the continent, Europeans still regard it as a dark continent. However, David I. Ker, quoting the Nigerian renowned playwright, Wole Soyinka, observes: "... indeed Soyinka has talked about the cannibalistic nature of human civilization" (2003:5). Also a critic observes: 'The past is not an invention, nor is it an intentional over-glorification of Africa. It is a reality and this is what many Western readers fail to appreciate' (Mbabuike, 2005:27). However, Niyi is of the opinion that economic empowerment of the country and its citizens are enough to turn the tide.

Nigeria's notorious prisons do not escape Atta's camera lenses with which she snaps pictures of the inhuman treatment that goes on there. Enitan says that Nigerian prisons are not correctional institutions but are calculated to dehumanize and break the individuals incarcerated there. Minor offenders are locked up with hardened criminals, and the sane share the same prison cells with the insane that at times the latter murder the former. Minor offences, like loitering during sanitation, are treated as a felony and attract imprisonment instead of a fine. The worst of the leadership is the military that

promulgated Decree No. 2 that empowers the state security agents to detain people for years without trial and ousted the jurisdiction of the court to inquire into the cases of the detainees. Political activists, critics and journalists are imprisoned without trial. John Okwoeze Odey eulogizes the effort and sacrifice of the Nigerian journalists during those darkest days in the country's history. He calls them the watchdogs of the society whose stars appear in difficult times (2001:21).

The military perceive critics as opponents and bundle them into prisons where they are detained without trial for several years; most unaware of the reasons for their detention; their relations uninformed of their whereabouts and why they are detained; some kept in lonely cells where they either lose their minds or die of any of the infectious diseases or are murdered. And this has been the bane of African leadership, as a reporter narrates: "Indeed, Taylor had hugely violated the fundamental rights of Liberians during his six-year rule as the president of Liberia. During this period, Taylor arrested and imprisoned thousands considered to be his political enemies" (*Newswatch*, 2006).

Indeed, Atta through Enitan's incarceration for a few hours in one of the Nigerian prisons, gives one an insight into the deplorable conditions of women-prisoners like no other novelist – male or female – before her. She shows that the courts spend their time on frivolities, hearing civil suits instead of criminal ones that decongest prisons. The

brutal military governments abrogate the rights of the citizens by the suspension of the constitution. With this singular act, the constitutional provisions on the rights of a suspect are jettisoned. She is detained as long as six years or more instead of within twenty-four hours as provided by the constitution; she may not be informed of her offence during and after arrest; she is denied her right to the counsel of her choice, and she is kept incommunicado. For instance, Enitan's father is detained without anybody's knowledge of his whereabouts. And in detention, he is unaware of the major issues in his life that happened during his absence. He is unaware that his divorced wife died; he has a grandchild, and Fatai is abroad on medical grounds. Also Mother of Prison is detained for years without trial.

By this graphic description of the denial of the rights of the citizens, Atta achieves one purpose: leaders that subject the citizens to violence turn them into brutes. And this is possible because the elite keep silent; hence, there is the need for both men and women to raise their voices against oppression.

Enitan makes it clear that the condition of the female prisoners is not different from that of the male. They live in congested prison cells; some do not know their offences; some have been awaiting trial for years. For instance, Mother of Prison has been in prison custody for six years without trial for killing a man, who wanted to rape her, in self-defence. Enitan shows a sick society

where mad people roam the streets and are raped and put in family way by men; a nation, where a married woman cannot obtain an international passport without the consent of her husband. She cannot bail an accused in police detention because she is a woman. A nation that still allows primitive customary practices to hold sway over its civil law. Atta paints a gory picture of a sick society that gives out a putrefying odour of decay and death. A nation where pregnant women are imprisoned and the imprisoned sick ones are uncared for, left to rot and die in prison. It is a nation that slaughters its young. The conversation between Mother of Prison and Enitan shades more light on this vicious cycle of a doomed nation and a doomed people.

“You have not grown up,” She said. “You’re still a child.”

“I am not responsible for your being here”, I said.

“Shame on you. Shame. Bringing another child into the world.”

“I did not arrest myself” (p. 277)

6.7 Aspect of Gender Silences in the Novel

Atta believes that gender silences in the face of oppression and brutalization are contributory factors to the erection and sustenance of the walls of imprisonment of the individual in the Nigerian society. In the novel, she shows that silence can be a weapon and a shield, depending on

how the individual wants to wield it. She tenaciously believes that silence is no longer golden in the face of oppression and degradation. For instance, the Yoruba custom expects a woman to keep silent. She has to be seen and not heard. Enitan's mother who is a conservative teaches her how to cook, stay indoors and stay off wayward friends. The same custom seals a woman's ambition. She cannot aspire to be a president, as no man desires a woman with tall ambitions. Niyi complains that Enitan is not a "domesticated woman" because she is independent-minded, involved in politics, and wants her voice to be heard, instead of conforming to the stereotyped "kitchen martyr". The other men consider her a bad influence on their wives.

Moreover, a married woman is supposed to keep sealed lips over her husband's sexual escapades. Sunny considers Clara Mukoro a disgrace to her family, for informing the press about her husband's bigamist status. Enitan's mother conceals the truth about her father until she grows up to see him for what he is. Enitan reasons about the Nigerian woman's shield of silence over her family: "Our mothers are wonderful, mostly. They shielded us from the truths about our father, remained in bad marriages to give us a chance" (p. 92).

Enitan has always thought the mother a source of the unhappiness in their home. When she discovers that her father has children outside the family, she confronts him with it and he shows no sign of guilt. It dawns on her this is

how he has driven the mother into religious fanaticism and an embittered recluse. She concludes that the worst men are not those ones that talk or beat their wives, but the so-called decent men, who with their silence ruin the women that live with them. And it is not surprising that as she leaves Niyi's house, the neighbourhood can only see, feel and think: "Everyone is talking about you. They say you left for no reason. He never beat you, never chased. I know he's moody, but he went to work for God's sake. What would you do if you were married to a lazy bugger like mine?" (p. 336).

The same culture that demands silence from a woman does not expect it from a man. From childhood, a boy is trained to be conscious of whom he is. He is brought up to appreciate his manliness. Niyi's cousin who speaks in a high-pitched voice has his manhood slapped on his face. Everybody in the family tells him "to speak like a man". It is a show of masculinity if a man beats the wife or girlfriend into submission or silence. However, the educated men in the novel feel that verbal altercations and beating of women are beneath them and use silence as a weapon of punishment. Enitan's father's silence drives the mother out of the house. Niyi's silence defeats her that she decides to park out to avoid her mother's fate, though the neighbourhood chides her. Niyi's father uses this weapon to force the wife to swallow her voice. She never joins in their discussions but she sits, listens and gets thrilled at his ideas and opinions. Niyi and his father

ignore her for granting an interview to the "Oracle". Niyi uses silence to punish his divorced wife, when she complains that his son refuses to call his stepfather a daddy. Enitan describes the bizarre family where this weapon is freely used: "They had the pride and lack of ambition of a generation that wealth would skip, and ignored each other because they thought it was common to quarrel openly. That was how they settled their differences." (p. 190)

Atta also makes it clear that silence is also used as an instrument of complicity and selfishness. Everybody keeps quiet at the exploitation going on in the country, because one way or the other, every man exploits those under him. For example, Pierre lives in Niyi's household. He is paid peanut wages and he lives in the worst environment with pit latrine in an elitist enclave. He keeps silent at the imprisonment of the father-in-law, out of selfish reasons. He does not want the wife to get involved. He neither wants her to be imprisoned nor lose her pregnancy. Niyi says he is only interested in his family and his family alone. Also, Sunny's family threatens his wife that he should get another wife if she is not bearing more children for him. He keeps quiet and does not rise to her defence because, secretly, he has already kept a mistress who bears children for him. Besides, Nigerians keep silent out of complicity, as political activists are known to keep silent when they are settled with juicy jobs and government appointments. This

ugly situation that leaves much to be desired is satirized in *Echoes of Madness*.

Akamonye: Okanume! Come out of that argument. There's no road there. In this modern age, oracles are no longer potent. It's the voice of the man that directs the wisdom of the oracle. As I was saying, I saw Osofia three nights before he faced the elders to interpret the wisdom of the oracle. I gave him the stipulated amount of money to purchase his voice (Nwabueze, 2001:23).

Gender silences can also be as a result of weakness on the part of the individual. Uncle Fatai, Niyi, Alabi, Dagogo and Debayo keep silent when the nation is burning and at the imprisonment of Sunny. Sunny tells Enitan that Fatai keeps silent "like a woman". And Niyi's silence prompts her to ask him: "What kind of woman are you?" (p. 336) She is frustrated to leave his house, as she cannot raise her voice in the prison walls of his kitchen and his silent presence. Also the professionals, like the Senior Advocates of Nigeria, keep mute for fear of being detained and the youths keep quiet as their interest is only in making money.

Again silence is used in the novel as a weapon of resentment and/or revenge. Enitan's father ignores the wife at public functions as he resents the calumnies she spreads against him in order to get him disbarred from the

legal profession. She keeps silent at his arrest and wants her daughter to stay out of his problem as a revenge for his ill treatment of her. Niyi resents his ex-wife and wants Enitan to do the same.

Sefi Atta strongly feels it is only the voice of the individual raised in protests against obnoxious native law and custom and draconian leadership that can bring about meaningful change in society. Grace Ameh, who symbolizes the revolutionary spirit in the liberated woman, organizes women to form a pressure group that calls on the government to release their relations from detention. Journalists and political activists raise their voices in protest to free the country from the deadly embrace of the military. The women-prisoners defy the intimidation of Mother of Prison to free Enitan from her verbal and physical abuses. Enitan ignores her husband and father-in-law's silent to fight for her father's freedom and to emancipate the Nigerian woman. She feels that the worst prisoner is not the one at home or in state prison, but the one whose prison is in the mind, that is, one who keeps silent when another is being oppressed or a state is in anarchy:

Everyone has at least one choice, my father said, whenever I talked about women in home prisons. He was shocked. How could one make a false and simplistic comparison! Likening a handful of kitchen martyrs to people confined in Nigerian prisons.

Some prisoners set free would choose to stay on, I argued. My point was about the condition of the mind (p. 331).

6.8 The Nigerian Woman's Complicity in Imprisonment

Atta is very honest in her treatment of the plight of the Nigerian woman. She boldly acknowledges the active role she plays in muffling her voice against an unjust system, unlike the other feminist writers before her. She loses the right to complain about male-domination if she helps to maintain the *status quo ante*. Peni's mother advises her after the husband battered her:

A little beating from your husband and you run home like a spoilt child. If your mother had run away each time your father had beaten her, would you have been born?... Tell me why you can't remain quiet in your husband's house like other married women (Alkali, 2005:21).

This statement from one of the female characters in Alkali's *The Descendants* tallies with Enitan's opinion that men ought not to be solely blamed for the women's plight. Enitan reminisces over Alhaja's authoritarian hold on the son's wives. Not only that she is instrumental to his abandonment of Sheri's white mother in England, but she intimidates the two African wives. Moreover, Enitan's mother strives very hard to bring her up as a conservative,

if not for her father's stiff opposition to that type of training. Sunny's mother suffers the hardship and broken-heartedness involved in a polygamous home; yet, she supports and advocates that the son should marry a second wife. And this is why a male critic dismisses the rationale behind men's sole responsibility to women's trauma. He queries: "Who are those that make life difficult for their daughters-in-laws? Are they not women – mothers and sisters who pretend to have better knowledge of women than men?" (Albert, 2002:67)

Enitan also believes it is pretentious for any woman to complain about a man's economic marginalization if she willingly decides to depend solely on a man. Sheri, for instance, is a trained teacher, but she decides to become the brigadier's mistress, instead of working. She erroneously feels that her beauty can sustain her until she learns otherwise: "Prettiiness could encourage people to treat a woman like a doll, to be played with, tossed around, fingered, dismembered, and discarded. Prettiiness could also make a woman to be lazy.... Now she was a kitchen martyr, and may well have forgotten how to flaunt her mind." (p. 109) Enitan's mother would also have taken the bull by the horn when the sickly son died, she would have gone out to get a job, but she decides to lock herself up in her house, go to her Pentecostal church and nurse her deep grudge against the husband.

The Nigerian woman is also a contributory factor to her own imprisonment. For example, Enitan's mother is

aware that her husband likes her to look beautiful and he provides everything to ensure that. With the birth of Arin and his subsequent illness, she finds it difficult to look pretty for the husband's admiration. After the son's death, instead of picking up the broken pieces of her life, she lapses into nagging, wearing a sullen face and exorcism of imaginary devils, which drive the husband into the waiting arms of other women. Enitan recalls, "My mother once had thirty three bottles of perfume on her dressing table, before she started wearing those church gowns smelling of bleach and starch" (p. 179). Enitan's father used to boast to her that the wife used to be the prettiest, the best dancer and she had the tiniest waist.

Besides, women contribute to the heartache of others. Sheri goes out with Ibrahim, knowing full well that he has a family; some go out with their girlfriends' fathers for money. Sunny's mistress must be aware he is married; yet, she has four children for him. Peter Mukoro's second wife knows he is already married with children. These are women who want to identify with the rich and the powerful men. When Mike tells Enitan he is an artist to impress her on their first meeting, she thinks: "Most women I knew would sprint from an artist. It meant that they might have to dabble with poverty and poverty always cleared people's eyes in Lagos" (p. 87). She sums it up in her statement that no man has any affair or relationship with himself.

Furthermore, women are always afraid and uncomfortable with other women, who have their own minds and are liberated. They do all they can to bring them down to their lowly level, where they will huddle together and complain that men oppress and subjugate them. Bono and Kemp state that,

‘Emancipated’ women have only become further isolated within institutions and in the eyes of public opinion. Not only do they continue to suffer the age old lack of respect and support of the ‘males’, they also now have to contend with the parallel lack of solidarity from feminism (1991:294).

In *Everything Good Will Come*, other women are jealous and afraid of Sheri because of her beauty and independent mind. She is seen as a street woman and an object of their gossips. At her rape, everybody blames her while overlooking the boys that committed the dastardly act that ruined her life. Enitan is also labelled a feminist, a hotheaded person because she raises her voice to be heard.

The reader ought to note that Sefi Atta succeeded in creating male characters that are not stereotyped like in other female fictional works. They are neither charlatans nor dummies nor spineless men. There is, therefore, some objectivity in their portrayal. These are men one sees everyday in one’s life. Sunny, for example, is not as

devilish as the resentful wife would want the reader to believe. It is evident that Sunny once loved her and still loves the daughter, but he is a more realistic person than the wife. As soon as he discovers that both of them are sickle cell carriers, he swings into action. He gets a mistress to bear children that will be free of the sickness. He keeps his affair outside from his family, bearing in mind what he suffered as a child in a polygamous home. In fact, some other men would have married a second wife as the family suggested, but he resisted that.

Another character that is well depicted, despite his failings, is Mike Obi. He would have made a better husband to Enitan than Niyi. He has a deep insight into people and actions. He helps Enitan to get reconciled with the mother and to appreciate her despite her weaknesses. His gentleness is also very amazing. He cooks for her and bathes her after their lovemaking.

The last person who washed me was Bisi, our house girl. I was nine. "Spread your lecks" she would say, and I would spread them hating her sawing motions. But Mike washed me with the gentlest motions, like a mother washing her baby. I felt sure that my fear was like any other fear, like the fear of a dog bite, or of fires or of heights, or death. I was certain I would never be ashamed again (p. 137).

Mike's bathing of Enitan after their love-making, therefore, is a symbolic act of cleansing. After the bath, she is purified of her cultural-oriented fear of sex, as an unclean act for women and a therapeutic treatment for the psychological trauma she suffered after Sheri's rape at the beach when she was a teenager. Before this bath, she ends up washing herself after sex with men. But after it, she stops the act. Mike also helps her to have a more healthy sexual relationship with the husband when they married.

6.9 Conclusion

Sefi Atta in *Everything Good Will Come* shows that the Nigerian woman actually lives in a prison, but by her acts and omissions she helps in its building and sustenance. The walls of her prison will crack and crumble, if she willingly raises her voice against obnoxious cultural and religious practices, antiquated legislation, and the inimical acts of home and state dictators. It is only through her voice raised in protest that she can gain her freedom, her family's and the entire country's. And to achieve this feat she needs the complementary voice of the men, because it is very evident that silences of any of the genders are no longer golden.

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Chapter 7

The Theme of Dispossession in A.N. Akwanya's *Pilgrim Foot*

7.0 Introduction

Nigerian poetry is presently in its third generation, and there are marked differences in each generation's handling of themes and stylistic presentation of its message. Despite the humanists' view that literature is about the individual and the society, which Chinua Achebe exhorts, thus:

An African creative writer who tries to avoid the big social and political issues of contemporary Africa will end up being completely irrelevant – like that absurd man in the proverb who leaves his burning house to pursue a rat fleeing from the flames (1976:173).

The first generation of Nigerian poets like Christopher Okigbo, Gabriel Okara and J.P. Clark-Bekederemo stubbornly believe that the poet does not have any social function. Christopher Okigbo quoted in Asein vividly articulates this lack of commitment. He says:

... the writer in Africa doesn't have any function.
That is, personally I can only say what I conceive as

my own function. I have no function as a writer; I think I merely express myself, and the public can use these things for anything they like... (1978:105).

Clark-Bekederemo completely affirms Okigbo's view when he says:

... it seems to me that people are creating for the writer an almost superstitious role which I find unbearable, as if he were a special kind of human being who has certain duties, functions, privileges mystically set apart from other human beings (Asein, 1978:107).

From the foregoing statements from two prominent poets of the first generation, the cardinal principle is that art should be for art's sake, which Roy Seiber believes, "Arts for Art's sake – as a governing aesthetic concept – seems not to have existed in Africa" (1962:8). G.C.M. Mutiso agrees with his opinion *in toto* when he wrote that "... it has been the tradition of their [African] culture to perceive the artist not as an individual but rather as a value creator and integrator" (1974:10).

Critics like Chinweizu and the others dismiss this first generation of Nigerian poets as Euromodernists, traditionalists and a "miscellany of voices of the middle ground who... share no strongly distinguishing characteristics" (1980:163).

The second generation of Nigerian poets, however, align themselves with the view of Ngugi wa Thiong'o that the obligation of the literary artist – whether a poet, a playwright or a novelist – is to probe into his society, try to capture its conflict and tensions with care and diligence and to speak for the voiceless many (1968 : 3). The poets of this group like Onuora Ossie Enekwe, Odia Ofeimun, Niyi Osundare, Catherine Acholonu are not lacking in social commitment, for in Joe Ushie's opinion:

They focus on the condition of the ordinary people, peasants, workers as they are informed by the exposure of the new voices to Marxism and the decolonization of African literature that had begun in East Africa (2005:19).

The third generation of Nigerian poets is the rising voices Niyi Osundare has described as being born around the country's independence in 1960. These are the ones that confront the nightmare which Nigeria has become and their poetic disposition ranges from "angry through desperate to despondent" (1996:40). The fiery temperament of this group, with its insistence on the exposure of the violations of human rights, dispossession of the weak and its defiance not to be caged from its social commitment can be seen in this poem.

Quartered in this shell
which shapes my tongue,
I will sing lifelong the song
of that child orphaned by design;
of that woman widowed by plan;
of our streets Peopled by bones;
of our black race and its Kamikaze race;
of the human rays headed for west, for waste
(Ushie, 1998 :15).

However, Abiola Irele in Ogunbiyi resolves the chasm between these three generations with his assertion that "... in a growing literary culture the canon is hardly ever stable or a final one, and every generation has the opportunity to shape its literary preference according to its own perception of the values it considers essential to the continuity of its tradition (1988 : 110).

Some of the third generation of Nigerian poets, who answer this sacred call to duty include Onookokme Okome, Joe Ushie, Chin Ce, Idzia Ahmed, Esiaba Irobi, Olu Oguibe, Femi Oyebode and very recently A.N. Akwanya with his publication of the *Pilgrim Foot*.

A.N. Akwanya who hails from Awkuzu in Anambra state of Nigeria was born in 1952. He is a Catholic priest and a professor of English Language and Literary Studies at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. He obtained his doctorate degree from National University of Ireland in Maynooth. He has many publications to his credit, which

include literary works, literary criticism and semiotics. He is a member of many learned societies, including the prestigious Nigerian Academy of Letters. Besides, he is an editor and co-editor of several scholarly journals. His latest work, *Pilgrim Foot*, under study is a collection of poems published on 30th December, 2005 to commemorate the silver jubilee of his priestly ordination. It is a ninety-three paged work with about forty-poems.

7.1 The Theme of Dispossession in Pilgrim Foot

Almost every literary work has either openly or subtly hinted on the theme of dispossession of the individual or populace in society. Richard Long and Eugenia Collier, for example, believe that the black Africans in their diasporas are left “disenfranchised, uneducated and impoverished” (1985:116). And thinking about Africa’s creative works, it is observed that African writers have made a marked departure from the concern with the ills, which colonialists have inflicted on an unwillingly race for the concern with the ills and cruelty which that race has inflicted upon itself (Roscoe, 1971:129). Chinua Achebe in one of his works is of the opinion that the failure of each successive government in the country is neither the massive corruption nor their manipulations by foreigners nor their stupendous economic policies nor the shooting of protesting citizens, but their “failure to reestablish vital inner links with the poor and dispossessed of this country,

with the bruised heart that throbs painfully at the core of the nation's being" (1988:141).

Moreover, a poet reflects on the monumental corruption in which the public is doomed to endless and cyclic poverty in 'Situation Report':

Poverty flows like poison
in the blood vessels of toiling people-
Fear knocks perpetually on their bones.
Dawn yields no sunshine.
The ignorant, undernourished poor
blame fate for their misery,
eulogize the flatulent rich
for little favours and delude themselves
that they too will flourish (Enekwe, 2005:25).

It is pertinent that in *50 Years of the Nigerian Novel* what the dispossessed like the defeated suffer and struggle against is not a "cultural or historical movement, but a convention that holds them as in mire, so that their ideals are forever out of reach" (Akwanya & Anohu, 2001:130).

Akwanya shows in *Pilgrim Foot* with its ironic title that dispossession takes several forms and the dispossessor comes in many guises. The reader would have thought that from the title the pilgrim, like the three Biblical pilgrims, who brought costly gifts to the Lamb of God at his birth, would be bearing gifts for humanity. But alas, the situation is the reverse for it resembles the situation in T.S.

Eliot's 'The Journey of the Magi'. Akwanya's pilgrim brings in his wake destruction, disease, spiritual drought, mangled limbs, death and decay.

From the very first poem in the collection, 'To the Master of the Universe,' the poet shows that the master of the universe, God, for unknown reasons, dispossesses man of life and property. He points out man's inescapable and unending cycle of doom and destruction, which the creator unleashes on its creature through natural disasters:

Sometimes it's a flood;
then a draught and famine
or a plague on a test run
after re-writing its softcode
with new lethal capabilities,
and newly upgrading;
then a desert extending its empire
chases out man and beast
with sand dunes and dust storms;
elsewhere, an earthquake lays waste human effort
kept up over centuries,
or a tsunami swallows up everything
and in one vast surge of sea
restores sway to ancient chaos (2005:2).

As if these series of natural disasters are not enough for man, the master also uses diseases like blood disorder to

mow down a promising young man or cancer or accident to cut down a family's breadwinner. At the end of it all, the master of the universe dispossesses man of his achievement of civilization, scientific and technological breakthroughs as he restores sway to ancient chaos and man's efforts are rendered futile as

death's relentless career
were sent back to the starting-line
like an aborted hundred-metre sprint (p. 3).

It is not only the master of the universe that dispossesses man of his life and property, but also Mother Nature is a great dispossessor. She has equipped her favoured, older children the power to marshal wind, rain, ocean and wield mountains like missiles; she has denied man land space. She also uses earthquake to harass man because:

If the mountain that plucked off its socket
at that head's shake
crashed just short of your dazed eyes,
what do you do
at recovering your breath
under the spray from her moist hair
turning the earth all around you
to one vast roaring waterfall
eight long days? (2005:22).

Besides, in four of the poems—‘Dedication’, ‘A Tangle of Words’, and ‘You are Now Led’, Akwanya shows that dispossession of the individual can be by choice. In ‘Dedication’, a devout father dispossesses himself of his first son whom he sacrificed for the sake of the gospel in order to realize his religious vows. The dispossessed at first does not notice the restrictions and the onerous duties imposed on him by his father’s sacrifice, as he is enthralled by the lolling and melodious voices of other lads who must have been sacrificed by their zealous fathers. As he grows up, he realizes the beautiful scenery of the seminary which has enchanted him initially is a prison, as he says, “How high and close the circling wall” and pondering the enormity of the dispossessor’s sacrifice, he wonders:

Did he find peace, giving away
What a man may lean on, as his,
Certainly, but never could own? (p. 7)

However, this type of dispossession by choice through religious sacrifice like Abraham and Hannah in the Bible differs markedly from that seen in Amma Darko’s *Faceless*. In Darko’s fictional work, she paints a damning picture of Ghana – the dirt, the disease, the spiritual drought, the death and the decay – as in Ayi Kwei Armah’s *Fragments* and *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*. She further adds the horrifying picture of the physical, emotional and

psychological alienation of children in the twenty-first century Ghana. One of the blighted and doomed victims of irresponsible government policies and insensitive parenthood reflects on what would have been the ideal situation in his life if he has a choice.

My dream, began the boy is to be able to go home one day to visit my mother and see a look of joy on her face at the sight of me. I want to be able to see a look of joy on her face at the sight of me. I wish her to tell me she was happy I came to visit her. Whenever I visit her, she doesn't let me stay long before she asks me politely to leave. She never has a smile for me. She is in a hurry to see my back. Sometimes I cannot help thinking that maybe she never has a smile for me because the man she made me with that is my father probably never had a smile for her (2003:26).

Also in 'A Tangle of Words' the poet reveals the effects of a name given to the child at birth or how the identity of a child shapes his future. Parents unwittingly dispossess their children of initiative and drive as there is everything in a name for "... it lays out a life", and

He foists upon this offspring to grow
Two or three more personalities
To keep him company? (p.14)

Furthermore, he does not only develop complex personalities because of his distorted identity at christening; this also determines whether he will be a murderer or a fraudster or simply a fool for he is just a quantity of mixed blood and sinew

Also in 'You are Led Now', Akwanya shows that the youth of this country is dispossessed of material possession, ethical values and societal norms. He is dispossessed of his means of livelihood, as he knows hunger, he hawks on the street as schools are closed because of the incessant strikes. As he eats off the street, he watches the degradation of societal values, and norms since there is widespread and horrendous moral decadence. He becomes part of the violence as he watches robbers shoot a man dead after old shoes are discovered in the bag they snatched from him, and law officers who ought to protect citizens but who unleash terror, violence and death on them. The effect of the dispossession of the youth by those in authority is that there is the deadening of conscience as he breaks the father's electric kettle, for

Father was so angry for his electric kettle you broke
And didn't shed a tear of remorse, ... (p. 46).

In 'My Father's House,' the poet gives out the message that one's father can dispossess him of personal initiative and inspiration that can lead the child to incipient laziness

and stupidity. While the father is alive, he is simply contented that the son sheepishly follows his shadow and does not attempt to develop his initiative. The son, on his part, has only one cherished dream – the ambition of owning and possessing his father’s mansion when the man is dead. As the old man dies and he steps into his shoes as the sole owner of his house, his deficient upbringing rears its ugly head in his lack of motivation, for he says:

considering the masonry
I have watched
year by year
spring new holes
that widened by the day
as sand-grains shook loose
one by one
and trickled away,
and the roof that has turned
black with rust
as I watched – (p. 66).

In other three poems: ‘Civil War’, ‘Ruins’ and ‘Seasaw’, A.N. Akwaya shows that those in authority can dispossess the citizens of their lives and property through wars. These selfish and heartless agents of war he designates in another work as ‘The Rough Beast’, a figure whose original home is in Yeats’s poetry” (2001:153). As a radical Nigerian writer observes:

Human beings cause wars, human beings at the helm of affairs start wars.... They misinform the people, they trick the people into war. The people are manipulated into war only to have their children killed, their houses destroyed by bombs and grenades. And all the time the generals and politicians stand aside, away from the death and destruction of the war and shout it is indeed a great war. A great war for them because they lose nothing and yet gain everything (Iyayi, 1986:63).

The poet in 'Civil War' captures the violent dispossession of life and means of livelihood, the spiritual aridity that comes with the war and the unforgettable traumatic memories that linger long after the war has ended. There is the death of both civilians and soldiers in the battlefields; there is the unprecedented starvation, the many diseases as people can no longer go about their daily routines, and the insensitivity prevalent in wars. Above all, he laments that as man becomes wolf to man, and unleashes untold violence on him, the victim's memory of the suffering will forever be haunted. For the lyrical persona who experiences the war says:

I remember my fear then, the last living thing she
saw of this indifferent world.

As if a pact, I was gripped with this death:

what should it mean to die for one watching a retreating back, mine? Whatever the answer, I forgot these twenty-four years till those same dying eyes stared again in a nightmare, and showed again the face of civil war (p. 35).

One should note that Akwanya is not the first literary artist to write on the Nigerian civil war, which was fought between the Nigerian federal government and the Biafran rebel soldiers. A decade and a half after the end of the civil war, another poet recollects the death of Nigeria's able-bodied young men over a baseless ideological war.

Over there at the front, young men
Clubber one another to the din
Of mortar shells and rockets
They groan painfully and die
For a cause they barely understand (Saro-Wiwa, 1985:24).

In 'Ruins', the poet again painfully points out the loss in men and materials in an un-ideological war. And he believes that no amount of civilization and development can wipe away these losses and the bitter and traumatic experiences of the war. The "shell-shattered buildings", "burnt-out husks" and "walls shot to pieces and tottering" like the 'liquid staring eyes' after twenty-four years in 'Civil

War' are ugly and gory reminders of the war. And the witnesses and migrants flee the other explosive situations:

When they wing back to the native turf the ruins
are there and look out over the tall grasses that
wave them on their way; blasted mouths are
opened, remembering, the bullets and shell know
your every last refuge (p. 38).

Besides, in 'Seesaw', the poet shows that the dispossession of the dispossessed in time of war is permanent in a country, where there are endless uncertainties and unpleasant packages. The violence, the diseases, the starvation and the deaths in the actual war have ended but the economic war, which the state visited on its own poor is ever present. Therefore, Nneka's attempt to begin life afresh after her soldier-husband is killed in the war-front and the death of her only son is rendered futile like the young girls attempt to reach "charity's doorstep" in 'Civil War' and the developmental effort to conceal the remains of the three roadside homes in 'Ruins'. The cyclic nature of dashed hope and dispossession is presented thus:

If she survives this would it be to make a new start
to build herself a life, and shortly after have a new
cause give fresh lease to the dying? Or was it
wrong, when life whispered to her, to awake, wrong

to embrace it? Had she recoiled and held aloof her present tears... but of course they would have welled from other sources (p. 41).

In addition to the above, the poet blasts the corrupt enrichment and the violence which African leaders – both political and military – unleash on their various states, which they run as their own personal ranches. In Plato's opinion, despotism is the worst form of government.

Then comes democracy, which is the adversary of oligarchy; and finally, that glorious thing, despotism, which differs from all the precedings and constitutes the fourth and worst disease of a state (1997:260).

African writers, critics, social commentators and historians have had adverse and cynical opinions of the despotic governments in Africa. A historian, Paul Obi-Ani, observes that the "bulk of African leaders of two thousand years ago or those of today have no love for their fellow citizens, kingdoms, empires, ethnic groups, towns and countries. Their ranks are populated by saboteurs, bootlickers, stooges, tyrants and treacherous characters" (2004:338). Also Tunde Olunsunle exposes the violations of the human rights of Nigerians, particularly detention without trial as practised by various oligarchies.

Doors of dreary dungeons
peopled by countrymen
Butts of repressive statutes
Swing open to cough and spill
Their stock of disheveled citizens (1996 : 50).

A.N. Akwanya also joins the rank of African writers, who bring to light the misdeeds of African leaders. And what he says in his poetic collection, *Pilgrim Foot*, is not only restricted to Nigeria but is of a general application to the continent. The message in *Pilgrim Foot* is similar to that of Chinua Achebe in *A Man of the People* as Bernth Lindfors observes:

While it is evident that the novel owes much to what Achebe had observed in his own country, many of the events described had happened and were happening in other independent African countries ... the ending was meant to be true to Africa and not merely truthful about Nigeria (1978:254).

In the poem, 'For the Record', Akwanya recollects the dispossession of Africa's and African's natural resources by various races – Arab, Caucasian and Negroid – who had ruled and are still ruling the continent. Slavery of the black race and colonialism were made possible because of the 'native indifference' of the race. However, another poet

feels that the superiority myth of the invading race cannot be ruled out as Obinna C. Okoye notes in 'Machiavellian' that:

I am told that my gods are not genuine,
That my deities are cannibalistic,
That plurality of gods is mortal sin;
My cultures, ethics, values lack logic.
Why do I libate to lifeless gods, and
Eat my yams in such a heathenish way? (Onochie,
2005 : 129)

Akwanya points out that even though the black stooges of the colonialists have taken over the mantle of leadership in the whole continent of Africa, there is no meaningful difference between the colonialists and African rulers: both are very corrupt as they appropriate the wealth of Africa "off record". He mentions, particularly, the military oligarchies, which ride into power through coups and counter-coups, promising to be anointed messiahs to the impoverished and dazed masses. But when they entrench themselves in the saddle, they loot the treasures, unleash hardship on their people, and run police states where their gangsters murder people for trivial reasons, and the citizens disenfranchised of their political rights because:

Now though he gathers up his countenance rises to
a miracle of the generals promising a change, that

now all tears are wiped away because they give up
their uniforms, And indeed the tears no longer flow,
staunchd by despair, seed of successful tyranny (p.
53).

Once again in 'A Public Man,' Akwanya beams his searchlight on the dispossession of the people's natural resources – land and minerals – as a result of the African leaders' endless wastefulness, laziness and foolishness. He associates successive brands of African leaders with gamblers, who rile and rage at the atrocities of their predecessors, only to do worse things than their predecessors. He wonders whether this cyclic doom to laziness, selfishness and lack of determination to break away from this syndrome of selling the continent, its people and natural resources to the highest foreign bidders is a generational curse. As the public man, the showy lyrical persona/gambler puts succinctly his dispossession of his successors:

One thing though:
father said I was his curse because of all the good
time I gave myself.
To this day,
I resent it since with us always
it's one generations toils – whatever survived the
funeral feast – the next lived on (p. 80).

The same theme of the dispossession of the masses runs through the poem, 'The Harvesters'. Africa's visionless, parasitic leadership – political and military – is presented as indolent pests, who feed fat and survive on the labour of the masses. He presents the repetitive activities of these destroyers thus:

Here most industrious weaver birds do their stunts,
chorus a hoarse shrill riotous tune stripping the
palms bare; they wait out in high boots the worst of
the rains, building up their numbers for the yearly
fray in the rice fields a hundred miles north (p.
28).

One should note that this persistent rape of the continent has drawn a lot of reactions from Africa's literary writers. Jared Angira's 'Rape I' quoted in Gareth Griffiths, the rape of Kenya is graphically pictured like the rape of a woman as in Nigerian-born Bode Osanyin in *The Noble Mistress*. Angira presents a disturbing picture of Kenya's rape:

For there...
She lay nude to the world
her belly tatooed
her blood spilt across
and ere I could inquire
... curfew
... martial law
and I longed no more to see her nude (2000:200).

7.2 Revolutionary Impulses in the Dispossessed

There is no shadow of doubt that the reckless rape of the continent, which draws reactions from African writers, must precipitate the awakening of revolutionary impulses from the despairing, defeated and dispossessed masses. Franz Fanon had earlier advised the wretched of the earth that the surest way of gaining their freedom is by revolution. And they should not hesitate to employ “all means, and that of force first and foremost” (1967:48).

Odia Ofeimun specifies what the dispossessed need in order to end the horrible and devastating reign of vicious parasites within the continent.

We need no mourners in our stride
no remorse, no tears,
Only this: Resolve
that the locust shall never again
visit our farmsteads (Griffiths, 2000:187).

This type of opposition to the degradation, violations of the rights of citizens, and corrupt enrichment of leaders is present in two poems – ‘Short of Breath’ and ‘Now I Have You’ – in the poetic collection under review. This resistance to corrupt and blood-sucking leaders has been subtly hinted in ‘The Harvesters’ where the poet predicts, “Unfailingly in August/ the hive is shot down; ... (p. 29).” However, in ‘Short of Breath’, he openly advocates for stiff resistance to the oppressors. The broken dispossessed

cannot afford the continued and continuing violations of their basic freedoms to qualitative feeding, shelter and movement. He envisions the backlash for the unnecessary tethering of the individual's rights and his alienation in a fruitful land thus:

Evening falls:
all the grass is trampled dead,
the tall stalks, crushed and withered,
hang in shreds over the beast.
Stubbornly he holds his ground and full of fight,
though his tongue lolls
like a mature tumour;
though he slowly chokes to death,
he quakes with pregnant energy
like an ancient lorry idling (p.49).

Furthermore, in 'Now I Have You', Akwanya hammers on the unexpectedness of the violent revolution which the dispossessed must use to gain their freedom. The persona says:

Since the mad man
and the ringmaster,
the ironical dog,
can I still bear a businesslike countenance
or forget that a serene smile
might just say,
Now I have you: See? (p.51)

Unfortunately, the resistance to oppression is introverted, instead of the masses directing their attacks on their oppressive rulers, they turn the violence on themselves, the caged volcanic temper of the dispossessed is directed on other dispossessed of the land in the forms of ethnic cleansing and religious fanaticism. At the end of it all, the victims of the dispossessed's anger, the defeated, lose their lives and limbs while the real robbers go scot-free. The poet says:

And
the massacres
for thinking differently,
or looking it,
the chopping of hands,
of feet
as a pre-emptive
lesson to any who may hesitate to say yea
when asked to. (p. 54)

There is also the failure of the masses to liberate themselves in 'Anonymous' in *Pilgrim Foot*. There is utter disregard for human life as the oppressed spit out their bottled venom on other oppressed while the oppressors, the sacred cows, go untouched and unscathed. Akwanya highlights the vulgar situation where the small-time burglar is dispossessed of his life, unceremoniously, that is, the extra-judicial killing in an anarchical state while the big

looters of the economy are free men. The poet bemoans the situation:

Slain, then set up for a day or two
as an object lesson in propriety,
he is without a name;
no one claims or knows him
thief that he was,
caught red-handed in the act.
Over him reigns a silence,
deep,
complete;
there will be no inquiry, no official
file opened in the police department.
there is no record he ever lived
or died (p. 86).

With these two poems, Akwanya shows that the call to resistance in every nook and cranny of Africa will fail and fail again if the dispossessed cling to religious and ethnic divide between them in a state where there is no efficient and effective legal system. A poet states: "We are not a people/without a voice/without a vision/without a spine" (Osundare, 1990:71). The attempt at freedom will be an unrealizable dream and a woefully futile effort if the resistance is misdirected at other dispossessed. However, this fragmentation of the defeated and the dispossessed

on religious and ethnic grounds has been rebutted by a Muslim critic, Mahmoud Hamman:

This is the allegation initially made by the
Orientals but now embraced by a wider,
more powerful and more vicious global clique
that Islam is synonymous with violence
Even the recent 9/11 episode in America is alleged
to be an attempt by Muslims to force their religion
on other cultures (2005:343).

7.3 Conclusion

A.N. Akwanya has shown that, indeed, man suffers from different forms of dispossession from diverse dispossessors. Some of the acts of dispossession are inevitable, and unleashed by forces stronger than man; he has to bear them. However, he cannot afford to continue to accommodate the brutal dispossession by fellow men without stiff opposition. The poet seems to suggest that the resistance will be an effort in futility if the dispossessed cling tenaciously to the ethnic and religious divides between them.

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Chapter 8

Prostitution – A Metaphor for the Degradation of Womanhood in Bode Osanyin's *The Noble Mistress*

8.0 Introduction

African female literary writers believe it is their sacred duty and “commitment to the mission of making heard the hitherto unheard voices, and giving some meaningful insights into the hitherto unexplored psyches of the female in our literature” (Acholonu, 2000:7). In the pursuit of this end, they are determined to reverse the male oriented portrait of the status of the African woman as romanticized, a mere chattel to be possessed by any man, and as a sex symbol to successful men. They regard with suspicion any man who attempts to write on any issues that are in the domain of women. Though Leopold Sedar Senghor's poems have come under the feminist criticism for their romanticization and feminization of Africa, and African womanhood, Obododimma Oha sees it as a stepping-stone to feminist goals. This is because “it provides a basis for the challenge of male chauvinist attitudes to issues of female revaluation and/or defence of women's rights” (1999:9). Besides, the feminists do not trust Achebe either as his female characters are treated as chattels to be possessed by any man. And Cyprian Ekwensi did worse than Achebe as Jagua Nana in *Jagua Nana* and “her friends find no worthwhile occupation beyond

prostitution ... deliciously happy to be equally beaten or 'kept' by these men" (Nnolim, 2000:115).

The African female writers set an onerous task of redeeming this battered image and marginalized status of African womanhood with the avowal that within African literature a "room must be made for women... room we fight for with all our might" (Minete, 1982:47). To achieve this, the first generation feminists endeavoured in all the genres to create women characters that are independent-minded, economically independent, with a good social status. And their male characters are presented with a biased and jaundiced view: they are weak and imbeciles. However, the new generation of feminists like Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Sefi Atta are objective in their presentation of their male characters – with their strengths and weaknesses. They are like men one sees everyday in one's neighbourhood.

Today, one of the recent voices to be heard on the status of the Nigerian woman is that of a male novelist, Bode Osanyin. In his debut novel – *The Noble Mistress* – he paints a horrible, sad and pathetic picture of the debasement of womanhood in Nigeria. He does not stop at that as he parallels this debasement of womanhood with the rape of the country and its populace. He shows that the fortunes of a prostitute and the Nigerian state run like tidal waves.

This two hundred and eighty-five-paged novel with its ironic title tells the sad story of a young girl, Jojolo, who

was raped by a politician when she was sixteen years. Because of the shame and taunt associated with this incident, she had to drop out from school to become a prostitute. At eighteen, she met a German sailor, who promised to marry her and later abandoned her, after putting her in the family way. She had a mulatto daughter from the German and brought her up and educated her with the proceeds of her prostitution. She tried several times to get a job but each time, the attempt failed because each male employer wanted sex from her before she could be given a job. She later got married to a wealthy politician and settled down to the life of a respectable woman. However, that was shattered during one of the military coups as her husband was murdered in cold blood. His untimely death thrust her once again into life in the street as a prostitute.

8.1 Prostitution as a Survival Technique

Bode Osanyin's work neither romanticizes about Nigeria nor purely pursues feminist issues; rather, he uses his novel like other third generation Nigerian novelists, as a vehicle for social criticism labelled "backlash" literature which "emphasizes the corruption and degradation of the city, and which gendered it female" (Kurtz, 1998:157). He dispassionately views Nigeria after forty years of independence as a rudderless ship in a turbulent sea, because of the insensitivity, greed and selfishness of its leaders. And the citizens are not different from others in

Africa, which in the opinion of Odimegwu, the “harvest of crises has been the lot of the African for as long as one may remember” (2004:97).

Like the social critic, Ngugi wa Thiongo, he paints a grim picture of the physical and moral aridity in Nigeria, which reduces the populace to a state of nothingness. There is not much difference between the blighted and infectious city of Lagos, where *The Noble Mistress* is set, and Ilmorog, with its class conflict. The narrator described Cape Town as being occupied by servants of state and money power and New Jerusalem, which was a “shanty town of migrant and floating workers, the unemployed, the prostitutes and small traders in tin and scrap metals” (Ngugi, 1977:280-281).

He systematically presents the enabling environment that degrades the citizenry, and compels women to sell their bodies as a survival technique, which in the opinion of Iniobong Uko “remains a major challenge to contemporary African elite and leadership” (2006:154). Bode structured his work like a pyramid, showing the destabilizing environment or the reason why women prostitute, how they fare in the business and the effects of prostitution on them. Jojolo, the main character, who narrated the events in her life and those of other colleagues, is a prostitute. She comes from a polygamous family. Her father has only one vice – he loves women and has five of them – though he is on the fringes of the middle class. He has several children from those women.

He is also a man who is consumed by a passion for material success, which holds the country in its throes. He is a tailor who cannot feed his family adequately; yet, he is hell-bent on keeping and maintaining an old and dilapidated vehicle at the detriment of his family. Jojolo recounts the cost of the family's addiction to this symbol of wealth:

With the Consul being fully owned,
we deteriorated from eating **pormo**
to cracking bones. Not that we minded
that very much . We were proud of Consul
and we were proud of our father.
We were the children of a car owner.
That was enough for us.
Our mothers too were
Proud of being the wives of a car owner.
They held their heads proudly in the streets
(Osanyin, 2000:18).

Apart from poverty being one of the things that can drive a child into the street, there is the power- politics, the intrigues, the bitterness and the rancour in Mr. Oshinbilu's house. Jojolo says, "If my father had one sin, it was the love of women. He had five wives. My mother was the fifth" (2000:17). Polygamy is no longer the idyllic fantasy in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*. Before Westernization, there was peace and love in polygamous

homes, but today the situation has changed dramatically. The reality of the relationship in such families is best captured in these images of violence and brutality.

... they regarded one another with an inner eye, tense, purposeful and as deeply furtive as it was foreboding, like two hostile families of beasts enclosed in a pen... And like animals it was the mothers who more than the children felt the threat to survival and need to ensure it in this vast enclosure where the slightest infringement was sure to cause a determined fight (Okpewho, 1970:84).

Okpewho's character, Obanua, tragically lost all his family members to death through poisoning by one of the wives. He had only two wives who have such venom for each other. In Mr Oshinbilu's case, he has five wives. Four of them are from the same ethnic group, and the last, his beloved, is from another. The other four women gang up to frustrate the last one, Jojolo's mother, who came into the family at the age of seventeen. The other wives ignore her, conspire among themselves and break her pot of *banga* soup in order to frustrate her out of the house. And when the situation becomes intolerable for her, she abandons her ten-year-old daughter and goes away. With the sale of Consul which had always taken her passion, and the mother's abandonment, Jojolo comes face to face

with the reality in the father's house, where she "hardly understood the politics within the family" (2000:17). As the mother flees the father's house of torture, she notices the triviality around her as "people praised the *ominira* on my head. Mankind praised *ominira* and refused to ask of the whereabouts of my mother" (2000:26). Her father is impotent to do anything to the other wives who sent her mother out as they are from the same tribe: Yoruba. The abandoned child's first act of rebellion is to cut off the hairdo on her head; she starts quarreling and fighting with people around her as she sees every other person, at home or in school, as "an opponent, in my eternal contest against life, against this world" (2000:28).

With this bitter experience of abandonment from her mother, she sees the world as a war-front where she must survive; however, she suffers series of abandonment from those who are close to her and who ought to have stood by her. Mr. Alonge, her class teacher, "hired her out" to Chief Raji, their councillor, who raped her. She realized that Mr Alonge betrayed her trust in him and was also appalled at the insensitivity of the people around her. For she says, "I shouted for help and cried and wept and screamed and pleaded. The wicked world would not listen" (2000:53). She uses five verbs – "shouted", "cried", "wept", "screamed" and "pleaded" to bring to the forefront of the reader's mind the image of the insensitivity of the adult society around her. After her rape, her step-mothers show so much malice as they taunt

her that she is a “bad girl” and a “true daughter of her mother. “This pained me most” (2000:55). Her step-mothers’ abandonment of her in her period of travail is the last straw that breaks the camel’s back. It dawns on her that she is a stranger in her father’s house and since he is helpless to discipline them, because they are “his folk and a man should not abandon his people,” she makes her own choice:

She found no home in a place where she thought was her home. She was a woman of no bitterness. And she went away quickly, absconding without a row... I think, however, that I am entitled to my own descent. Nobody would take this away from me. I am of mixed-blood. A hybrid is entitled to a place in this world (2000:36).

Her abandonment continues, even when she takes her destiny into her hands. As a prostitute Klaus Meyers, who promises to marry her and gets her pregnant, dumps her with the unborn baby and sails away from the shores of Nigeria. Jacknobody, her pimp, also abandons her when the father comes to take her away from Oko Biriki, where she hawks her body. Okafor Ikenga, whom she lavishes money, food and her body on, ditches her when Mobolaji da Costa, who bank-rolls her saw them in his flat. It is only the father whom she despises because of the destabilizing environment in his home that stands by her until he is

murdered by her pimp. She emotionally describes him as the shepherd in the Bible “who lost one sheep out of one hundred sheep and abandoned ninety-nine sheep to look for the one sheep that was lost” (2000:3).

Bode Osanyin does not leave out the influence of violent Western films with their negative impact, whose destructive effects and “orgies of blood” had been predicted almost five decades ago (Achebe, 1960). Jojolo as a growing up child is engrossed with these films that extol brutality, violence and bloodshed. When she is very young, she is allowed into the cinema hall to watch them free of charge. But as she grows older, she has to pay and she steals money from her mother and step-mothers to watch them. She has several heroes whom she adores in these films and she sees them as role models. Therefore, she sees Jacknobody, as his name implies, ‘a nobody’, a common pimp and a sloth without his jackknife, as her hero because he stakes another good-for-nothing competitor with his jackknife. She describes the encounter thus: “That was the battle of battles – the day Jacknobody staked Red Eye like a piece of ‘suya’ meat. Those were the ‘western things’ we did in those days” (2000:7). He becomes her idol and her pimp. Parental authority wanes before those violent men. Her father cannot take her away from her demeaning job as she is ‘protected’ by Jacknobody, who hires her out to men, ravishes her body, and fleeces her of her income from prostitution. Her father pays the supreme price – death – for taking her

away from him. However, she later discovers that her childhood hero is a bum, and dumps him, though she does not quit prostitution. Bode, therefore, by describing the hostile environment where Jojolo grows and lives is saying pointedly that circumstances make it impossible for her and other women to live a respectable life. The reader should blame the environment and not Jojolo for the degradation of womanhood as Moll Flanders denigrates her society for turning her into a whore, a thief, an incestuous woman and eventually an exile. In her words:

Had it been the custom in our Country, I had not been left a poor desolate Girl without Friends, without Cloaths, without Help or Helper in the World, as was my fate, ... (Defoe, 1993:2).

8.2 How Prostitutes Fare in their Business

Osanyin makes it clear that prostitution is an arduous profession. Jojolo's experience is not unique to her as it is prevalent among prostitutes. Firdaus explains the rigours of the trade:

I never used to leave the house
In fact, I never even left the bedroom.
Day and night I lay on the bed,
Crucified, and every hour a man
Would come in. There were so many of them.
They were all married, all educated, all
carrying swollen leather wallets (Saadawi, 1983:57).

From the very first page of the novel, Jojolo compares herself to a “woodcutter” and a “labourer” to show that this is really a very hard job. And it is a job that wears out one’s soul and body because our “youth is what we sell” (2000:1). And apart from selling their youthfulness, they also sell their beauty. As a result of the wear and tear on the body because of constant ‘carrying’, “at the age of thirty-nine, I already feel really old” (2000:1). At the age of thirty-nine when she ought to be in her bloom, she is already used up. And in order for a prostitute to maintain her beauty and youthfulness to attract men, she must bleach. Though Jojolo neither bleaches nor uses make-up when she joins the trade newly, her mentor in the business does. And she says: “You only need to see Auntie Rose. I bet you, you cannot fix her colour, or colours, no matter how you try. The tip of her nose is black. Her left cheek is brownish red. Her right cheek is yellowish tending towards grey. Her chin, I think an interplay of red and black...” (2000:2). But as she gets older and men consume her, she starts losing her beauty and youthfulness as her breasts sag, bags appear under her eyes. She has a swollen face with wrinkles. She says: “Descending, I started using more and more make-up. I started to wear artificial eyelashes, artificial eye-brows, rouge on both cheeks, and, can you believe it, I finally began to apply lipstick, a thing I had earlier abhorred” (2000:133).

Bode Osanyin also shows the enormity of debasement of women in the country. The narrator from the first

chapter of the novel tells the reader that despite the wear and tear associated with prostitution, it is not a profitable job. She says that though she has not descended to the level of Auntie Rose, who carries every man that comes her way, "Auntie Rose has not made it. But I have not made it either" (2000:2). The prostitutes spend all their money on make up to maintain their beauty and youthfulness, or they have dependent relations whom they cater for or they spend the money on hospital bills. Auntie Rose takes care of four children and her aged parents. Jojolo spends all her money on her illegitimate daughter. Angelina has a daughter who is married with four children and she is "still marching on like an old soldier". Moreover, age was "telling on her more and more. She had been hospitalized thrice – on account of body pain" (2000:257). At times the men who use them do not pay them. The pimps who are their "pieces of husbands" take them for *gratis*. The soldiers see them as part of the spoils of their coups. The pimps are paid "a handsome percentage of the proceeds" (2000:66). Therefore, the fact that prostitution is a dreary profession that is unprofitable, is seen in the type of environment where the prostitutes live. They usually dwell in one-roomed shanties in the worst slums. These are people Kofi Anyidoho described as the "'class of people' 'produced' by our various failed development programmes, and too often condemned to a nightmarish existence in those

sections of our urban centres systematically “overlooked” by our planners of urban growth” (2003:20-21).

Bode Osanyin does not leave out the risky aspect of prostitution in Jojolo’s narration of events in her life. Jacknobody kills Jojolo’s doting father for snatching her away from his greedy grasp. And she says, “...shortly after my father was murdered, another strange thing happened. Auntie Rose was beheaded” (2000:90). The assassin drains the blood from the head into a basin and takes it away. Though the perpetrator of such a dastardly act is not caught, the fact he knocks on all the prostitutes’ doors on that fateful night makes her to reach this conclusion:

I felt that many of us, if not all of us, had been earmarked for elimination by murder. I felt this was the grand plan. The murderer must commit more murders to conceal his original urder (2000:105).

Ironically and sadly, Auntie Rose who had worked so hard, who could not eat well because she was saving her money in two reputable banks in town with the intention to retire to a respectable job, could not do that because of her untimely and brutal death.

Furthermore, prostitution and prostitutes are frowned upon by the society. And that is why her father follows her around to rehabilitate her. He tells her, “I cannot bear to see the daughter of my loins be sewage” (2000:39). She slaps her father for calling her a “sewage” and sobs. She is very hurt and kneels down before the father to beg him to

withdraw that word, the old man refuses. She cannot bear the thought that "... I was septic tank. So I was a universal soakage. An indiscriminate receptacle. A soakaway" (2000:39). She calls her body a "United Nations" because she has had sexual relationship with men from every country, colour and age. Throughout the time she is in the profession, she hates her male patrons being referred to as "customers"; she prefers them being called "visitors".

It is not only Jojolo that hates her profession. The other prostitutes are not happy with their type of job; hence, they all conceal their true identities from their colleagues and customers alike. Those who are old at the business use "fictitious common names", they never use their "real names" but adopted a "trade name" (2000:30). However, because she is young and naive, she uses her real name, "Jojolo", though her colleagues conferred on her the beautiful name of "Morning Star" because of her great beauty and youthfulness.

Her daughter, Tosheju, is ashamed of her mother because of her type of profession. She refuses her mother seeing her off to her elitist school, Queen Elizabeth High School. And if she ever comes to see her, she pretends she is a relation and ignores her with her schoolmates. She thinks of her daughter's reaction to her lifestyle because "her school mates made jest of her", for she is not a "virtuous woman" (2000:132). No one can blame the daughter for her reaction as none can come back to the house and see the mother with different men as the

young, intelligent girl “met my filth”. Also Honourable Momoh and Amina are surprised that such a beautiful woman as Jojolo lives in such an environment. Mobolaji da Costa artfully takes away Tosheju from her and puts her in a boarding school so that she is not contaminated. Alhaji Shinkafa who has the courage to marry her and settle her as a wife wonders why such a beautiful woman like her would choose the life of a tramp.

Another problem that arises from the degradation of womanhood is unwanted pregnancy and single-parenthood. Jojolo is pregnant for a German who dumps her and sails away. She wants to abort the pregnancy but the father dissuades her. She carries the pregnancy and even during the period of gestation, she prostitutes in order to survive. When she delivers the baby, she has to cater for her all alone. She finds out the hard way that single-parenthood is not an easy job as she provides all the material needs of Tosheju. She complains, “It appeared she was out to suck the best out of me and then throw my carcass to the vultures. She would like to consume me, to eat me out” (2000:236).

It dawns on her that she cannot provide the emotional side of the daughter: She cannot provide her with an identity because of her bastardry. Tosheju is painfully aware that she does not have a father, though she finds a substitute father in Mobolaji da Costa, whom she comes to call “daddy”. She tells her schoolmates that she does not have any tribe because of her fatherless status. The

mother does not appreciate this vacuum in her life and wishes she has a son instead of a daughter. But a father confers a child with an identity and those who are fatherless, whether girls or boys, because they are bastards have a stigma and a burden.

We can do without fathers ... I do without mine alright. An then too, if there aint no father in the house, you get the feeling you is the man in place. It's good feeling when anybody like sanitary inspector or police come in an' ask who is the man round here, and you say, well there's one man round here, an' 'tis me (Lamming, 1953:40).

No matter what the feminists may say or do or think, illegitimacy confers one with rootlessness. In African diasporic literature, 'rootlessness' as a result of 'fatherlessness' is a recurrent theme in the works of Samuel Selvon, George Lamming and Alex Haley. In Haley's *Root*, for example, Kizzy is one of the lucky slaves, who know their parents as most of them are sold as toddlers. The following conversation between Kizzy and Malizy underscores that point.

Kizzy said, 'My pappy real name is Kunta Kinte. He a African'. 'You don't say!' Malizy appeared taken aback. (1977:401).

Illegitimacy is not only confined to African diasporic literature, it is also abhorred in African societies. In Leonard Kibera's *Voices in the Dark*, the street-wise,

defiant Dodge Kiunyu says, "Never had a dad in my blinking life. My whoring ma would never figure out who my pop was. It was one of the scores of men who took her for a bed-ride but she wasn't bothered to remember who among them I resembled. That's my mother" (1970:7). But illegitimate children are usually the problem of women from very poor background. For the propertied, elite women, the question of illegitimate children in the past is almost non-existent. Those few who had them had "probably given them up for adoption (and omitted them from their wills) in order to preserve their good reputation" (Arrom, 1957:123).

8.3 Redeeming Features for the Prostitute in the Novel

Unlike in Cyprian Ekwensi's *Jagua Nana*, which tells a 'story of the agony and ecstasy of hope and despair, of dream and reality and of inner innocence and outward sinfulness of a Nigerian "fallen" woman', (Emenyonu, 1991:67, where there are redeeming features, but *Jagua Nana* failed to take them, Bode Osanyin's *The Noble Mistress* tells exactly the same story, but there are no redeeming features available for Jojolo. Jojolo would not have opted to be a prostitute in the first instance if she is loved. She believes that her step-mothers do not want her around the house because she is not from their tribe – Yoruba – like the mother who is an Itsekiri woman. And she regards her father's love for her with suspicion and distrust. She gets attached to the German sailor, Klaus

Meyer not just because of the material provisions she gets from him for the three months they stay at Hideout but she loves him and likes to stay with him because “he gave me his love. His one hundred per cent attention” (2000: 123). Within that period, she stays secluded and detests “the contamination from the outside world” (2000:109). In other words, because she loves and is loved, she completely stops prostitution and stays away from other prostitutes and the demeaning environment.

Besides, if she has a job, no matter how menial it is, she may have resisted the temptation of prostitution. She finds to her chagrin when she goes out to look for a job, that all employers make it a condition precedent to sleep with her before they can offer her any job at all. Auntie Rose joins prostitution because she rejects her mother’s backbreaking job that cannot sustain the family.

Another redeeming feature to stop her from the degradation of womanhood and motherhood would have been a stable marriage. Even during the period she is Mobolaji da Costa’s mistress, she does not indulge in prostitution. However, she is disgusted with their sexual relationship. She says his embrace as being squeezed by a python and, “In all this fondling, my man was good but in the actual performance... zero!” (2000:145). When she finds the situation unbearable, she gets a man-friend. Besides, throughout the period of her marriage to Shinkafa, she comports herself as a respectably married woman. She refuses the advances of Honourable Momoh

who shadows her to establish a love affair with her. She is grateful to the late father and reminisces, "I am a changed person now. I am trying to be good ... I have now come to realize my previous follies, my unnamable transgressions ... I had turned the new leaf you asked me to turn some years back. I hope the leaf will forever remain green" (2000:224). Unfortunately for her, the marriage does not last because the soldiers slaughtered Shinkafa during their coup. After that, she makes a reasonable effort to reunite with the late husband's family and when the elder brother gives her impossible conditions, she heads for the streets again.

8.4 Degradation of the Populace

In addition to the above and parallel to it, Bode Osanyin in the novel uses the metaphor of the degradation of womanhood for the degradation of the Nigerian masses. He sees the Nigerian leadership, after forty years of independence from British colonialism, as being "made up of complex networks of regional politicians, military cliques, communal powerbrokers and commercial and bureaucratic elites, Nigeria's ethno-regional political classes presided over a fragile Federal state structure that failed to provide viable institutions of governance" (Vaughan, 2005:113). He presents a country that is raped by the leaders - military and political - in the face of what Achebe calls the "hypocrisy, self-deception and timidity of the citizenry" (Ohaeto, 2000:183).

In Jojolo's narration, she describes the politicians as a group of people who get on the people's nerves by the mindless and senseless rape of the country. They squander the nation's wealth. Chief Raji is a councillor without a conscience. He rapes teenage girls in order to rejuvenate himself; yet, he has risen in the civilian government to be a minister. Senator Momoh who is described as a billionaire is a "charge and bail lawyer", a "ragtag and riffraff" before he went into politics four years ago. He is in the senate and the director of immigration. This is a man who has several girl-friends and uses state funds to send them on spending sprees abroad. Also senator Ghadamosi is hundred times a billionaire who "proclaimed that he wanted to acquire all the wealth of the country in order to redistribute it to the poor" (2000:249).

The height of the irresponsibility of the political class is seen in the state ball where there is so much to eat and drink. Even champagne that has been banned by the same government is served at the ball. There is so much wastage and four bands are brought in to titillate the men and women at the ball. The military men fraternize jovially with the politicians and the "cheeks of each and every person was well rounded and robust. Their complexion glowed. Everybody was fresh and well fed" (2000:203). The situation in the country has created a generation gap war between the corrupt and morally bankrupt leaders that Bankole wishes "... there are times I find moral depravity in this country so nauseating that I wish there

could be a genuine revolution to restore sanity and public probity" (Ike, 2000:224).

The revolution had come seven years after the country's independence in the form of a civil war. Brothers fought brothers with lethal weapons. Jojolo says that even though the nation is burning, the politicians and their property are being set ablaze and there is curfew restricting people's movement, the government pretends that there is normalcy in the country as foreign journalists and delegates visit it. The attempt to sweep the dirt under the carpet does not succeed as Douglas Killam comments on the bloodbath in the country "... the hospital grounds, in the outlying areas of Enugu were literally littered with maimed and injured bodies of the victims of the Northern Pogroms of the November/December of 1966" (Petersen & Rutherford, 1991:160). And several years after the devastating experience, the bitter memories still linger in the *Pilgrim Foot*.

The liquid staring eyes
surprised me again twenty-four years
after they were extinguished -
rather,
they never were extinguished,
but stared on
through slanted dead lashes (2005:37)

Bode reflects the military brutal leadership in the country. Theirs is worse than the people they have come to replace. They suspended some parts of the constitution that are inimical to their interests; ousted the jurisdiction of the court, and dissolved the second arm of the government – the legislature – and acquired its powers. They embarked on the governance of the country by decrees. The fundamental or basic rights of the citizens suffered worse under them than during that of the politicians. It is a trite statement that “in the countries of the so-called third world, families often lack both the means necessary for survival, such as food, work, housing and medicine and most elementary freedoms” (Aghamelu, 2004:71).

From Jojolo’s narration, the reader notices that the rape, the trample and the violations of the rights of the citizens are common under the military. Women are raped as Jojolo says, “My private parts got some stitches. How could I have known that those soldiers had me?” (2000:271). Chief Raji, a politician, rapes her as a teenager and he is taken to court and nothing comes out of it. Instead, Chief Raji moves on in his political career, Mr Alonge, who procures the girl for her is promoted. The most demoralizing thing is that it is not only that the court acquits and discharges Chief Raji of any criminal act on a juvenile, the wronged party pays damages to their accused. Jojolo says, “My father who in addition, was asked to pay a staggering cost to my rapist. That was the

verdict of the court. Not mine" (2000:54). Under the military leadership, however, there is no trial at all as it is certainly believed that rape "legitimately belonged to bloodless coups" (2000:271). Certainly, section 34 of the constitution that "no person shall be subjected to torture or to inhuman or degrading treatment" does not apply to the military oligarchy.

Osanyin also shows that section 44 of the *Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999* which states there ought to be no compulsory acquisition of the citizens' movable and immovable property in any part of the country is thrown to the dogs under the military. At least, the politicians despite their horrible treatment of the poor and the wretched among them simply relegated them to Oko Biriki where there is eternal darkness. Jojolo wonders if "Oko Biriki was part of the world. River Thames was certainly not. It could go ablaze and vanish. It appeared we had been abandoned. Forsaken" (2000:30). This attitude of the leaders to the led is not limited to Nigeria and fictional setting of Oko Biriki. Charles Mangua describes Nairobi's Eastleigh in this manner: "We are staring at a row of shanty houses in front of us. I am wondering why we must always have dust and flies. Dust and flies, smoke and evil smells, that's what we've got. Nude hungry children and dirty whoring mothers – that is the order of the day" (1986:26).

However, the military compulsorily and without any compensation acquires Oko Biriki and thrusts New City on

the poor dwellers. Oko Biriki is turned into a paradise where the rich and foreign tourists luxuriate in its new splendid environment. Meanwhile, New City is not quite unlike the symbolic Coketown in *Hard Times*, which Dickens describes thus, "... at the heart of the labyrinth of narrow courts upon courts, and close streets upon close streets, which had come into existence piecemeal, every piece in a violent hurry for some man's purpose, and the whole an unnatural family, shouldering and trampling, and pressing one another to death" (1995:49-50). In Jojolo's description, New City is not only a slum, a "piece of wasteland, sprawling, spreading, spreading like vegetation unkept, unnurtured" (2000:181). It is also a city inhabited by all manner of criminals. She advises Tosheju not to visit the city alone because apart "from armed robbers raging the streets and lanes, there are kidnappers, ritual murderers, rapists and assailants who will not let innocent souls like you move about in peace" (2000:189). From this description, Bode Osanyin shows that despite the military's use of brutal force to govern the citizens, they haven't turned out to be better citizens. In fact, the indignities they are subjected to turn them into criminals. This is evident from the degrading beheading of Auntie Rose as Jojolo concludes, "The crime was perfect. It was surgically clean. It was surgically executed. It was masterly executed than any crime I had watched in the movies. This was an era of scientific crimes" (2000:106).

The military also deny the citizens accused of criminal offences of the constitutional guaranteed rights in section 36 of the constitution. Mobolaji da Costa who is accused of stealing money would have bribed his way out of the case if it were under a civilian government. But under the military, he violates a provision of one of the many decrees promulgated by the military. The court does not try him, but a military tribunal and no lawyer defends him before it. He does not have a right to appeal against its decision to any courts of the land. He is sentenced to twenty-three years imprisonment and he is relieved and says, "Thank God! At least, I will not be facing the firing-squad. That one has not yet been promulgated and backdated" (2000:174).

Also Jacknobody who is suspected to have killed Jojolo's father is caught and after a brief trial, he is executed. His right to appeal, up to the Supreme Court, and if he is poor, his defence paid by the state are ignored.

Besides, Shinkafa is murdered in cold blood during the coup for being critical of the government. Every military regime in Nigeria has tried to bulldoze, silence and mangle the opposition. The same attitude is reflected in Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's the *Purple Hibiscus*. In *Waiting for an Angel*, the narrator recounts the evil consequences of challenging the military.

We flinched as our eyes fell on his bare torso; every inch was covered with thick punctured weals. He had been systematically beaten from his face down to his legs. One arm was fractured – it lay by his side in a thick plaster (Habila, 2003:75).

Bode Osanyin also believes that in the face of military draconian leadership, the courts of the land become impotent ; judicial activism flees; the voices of the judges become muffled, and they become robots as justice Okpetun resolves “to do the master’s bidding so thoroughly that it would not be long before another offer would come his way” (Ike, 2000:103).

Jojobo’s story shows that the judiciary is not only corrupt but also incompetent. The courts somehow acquiesce to the politicians’ and soldiers’ rape and degradation of the citizenry, and they are seen to abdicate their responsibility to the people. Chief Raji and Mobolaji Anthony Williams’ cases are evidence of a disappointing judiciary that is not alert to the rights of the citizens. No wonder the raped populace, without any solace, turns its anger inward and unleashes mayhem on itself. This is because it believes that “members of the judiciary and the police force are portrayed as corrupt men who make it possible for the powerful men to go free after committing numerous lawlessness” (Okonkwo, 2006:236).

Bode Osanyin also portrays the Nigeria police force as swimming in a pool of stinking decay. It is so corrupt that it

is not vigilant to its constitutional duties: to keep law and order within the state. This is evident in its double-faced attitudes to both the rich and the poor. When the policemen suspect Jojolo as the murderer of Mr. Oshinbilu, because she is living in the prestigious Hideout, they decide to put her under house arrest, instead of taking her to the police station. Her treatment is contrasted with the one meted on Jacknobody, when he is arrested for the murder of Jojolo's father.

Their incompetence is also highlighted in the way they investigate criminal offences. This is seen in the murder of Auntie Rose, whose murderer is never found and in Mr. Oshinbilu's case, it takes several weeks to arrest the murderer. Because the police are corrupt and incompetent, the nation burns, citizens are set ablaze, violent crimes rage on, several coups and countercoups that Jojolo says are innumerable that she cannot remember them, with one of the military governments lasting for only six months. These coups are going on because just as the pimps rape the prostitutes of their bodies and earnings from prostitution, the military take pleasure in looting the nation.

8.5 Figures of Speech Used in the Novel

The predominant figure of speech, which Bode Osanyin used in the novel to bring out his major theme of the degradation of womanhood and the masses, is symbolism. From the very beginning, the country is presented as a

very materialistic society, where the narrator, Jojolo, recollects her childhood experiences. She mentions the father's car, Consul, which gulps most of his earnings. This car becomes the symbol of wealth and material success. The society views the family as being very wealthy. Its sale severs the fragile relationship that exists between Jojolo's mother and the other four women. It may also be the car that attracted her mother to marry a man old enough to be her father. With the sale of the vehicle, she is no longer the wife of a car owner and cannot hold her head up in the society; therefore, she decides to quit the marriage, abandoning her only daughter to her fate. And this singular act destroys the young girl's life.

Another symbol of success in the work is Paradise Club. It also represents the pretentious and moral decadence, which are reflected in the novel. This is a club that is the cesspool of sex; yet, no woman can enter its gates without being escorted. Osanyin shows the discriminatory and degrading treatment heaped on women when Jojolo states that "No woman could enter Paradise unaccompanied. She had to be accompanied by a man, any man at all, any bearded thing could do –just a 'piece of husband' as we used to call such" (2000:67). This marginalization is what African feminists have always fought. A literary critic believes that African indigenous societies reserved positions, powers and independence to women, which was subsumed by colonial government. However, successive "post colonial governments built on

the colonial marginalization of women" (Chukwuma, 2004:35).

Osanyin also believes that women cannot continue to talk about their degradation, since they cannot unite in their struggle to fight their common enemies and the laws they make that degrade them. His position concurs well with that of a woman who states that "... women are also largely responsible for their status in certain ways. Women seem quite happy and contented with their positions and are invariably the guardians of the very cultural values ... that continue to suppress them and deny them their rights in society" (Abuya, 2002:108).

The Paradise Club regulation on banning unaccompanied ladies does not have any exception; working class ladies as well as prostitutes are included in its ambit. However, when the women organize a protest against it, there is so much discrimination on trivial grounds that they ended up having strife among them, which encourages the police to chase them out of the hall. At the end of the day, they have achieved nothing and the regulation still operates against them. Because of their inability to present a common front, their degradation continues unabated. This is also true of the whole society, which cannot successfully organize a revolution against the parasites, which suck its blood. Shinkafa's vision of the "revolt of the masses", "people's revolution was the ultimate revolt" (2000:266) never materialized. Instead, there is another bloodless coup in which the other

“politicians were merely arrested. Only my husband was killed in cold blood.” The parasites get entrenched in the people’s system and the cycle of doom and decay continues without any hope of respite for the people. Sefi Atta agrees with Achebe’s position that the leaders’ disposition to the rule of man rather than the rule of law is possible because of the timidity of the populace. Enitan argues with the father, “some prisoners set free would choose to stay on, My point was about a condition of the mind” (Atta, 2005:331). Like Roger Clark’s opinion in the ‘Introduction’ to Gustave Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary* that the author “provides the reader with the bleakest of moral messages” (1994:xx), that is, the act of adultery and its repercussions, Bode Osanyin’s message to his reader is about the effects of degradation of womanhood and the citizenry.

Another symbol of this degradation and material success in Nigeria is Chief Raji’s “Ambassador”. Jojolo, a sixteen-year-old secondary school girl, is enthralled by the councillor’s cozy car. As she is driven in the beautiful car, she notices that “Ambassador” outclassed the dilapidated “Consul”. She describes the upholstery inside as being “velvety”. If not that it had been ingrained in her psyche that the ownership of a car is a tell-tale sign of affluence and success, she would have insisted on getting down from the vehicle with the class teacher, Mr. Alonge. Her dream of being driven home in a smart vehicle beclouds her sense of apprehension. She realizes late the truism in

the saying “all that glitters is not gold”. The man’s outward appearance does not match his mental make-up. Chief Raji’s rape of the teenager drags him down from his Olympian height to the level of a common criminal: a rapist. And this is possible in a country where:

The world has gone mad
With the lust of the eye
The god of sex has come to power
And holds the world in a death embrace...
The Devil drags sex through the mud
He makes man drunk with mad desires
Then takes them bound, and blinded
Through a whirl wind path of woe (Eko, 2005:116-117).

Besides, Paradise Club is used as a symbol of moral decadence, degradation and marginalization of womanhood in the country. Jojolo says that no woman can enter its gates without being escorted by a man. It also shows women as being incapable of handling their affairs as they disagree among themselves on who will join or not join the rally to fight a common cause. The sham in the society is shown for what it is. Any woman that enters the gate with any man can dump the man and find male customers from whom she can make a brisk business. It is like the state banquet where women are not allowed alone. These two represent the highest point of

immorality and decadence within the country. Most of the men do not come with their wives as they are caged in *purdah*; rather, they prefer this option:

Many of the men felt free with many of the “Mrses”. I began to put two and two together. Although a man was entitled to many wives, he was also entitled to many ‘Mrses’ who were not legally his ‘Mrses’. It would take more than being a casual observer to decipher stable wives from floating ‘Mrses.’ Such was the situation at the state ball (2000:216).

Ironically, the pretence to honour and purity is a hoax. Once the lady gets inside, she gains social acceptability. Jojolo, though a prostitute whom Jacknobody escorts into Paradise Club wins the best dancer of the day and earns a crown for that. At the state banquet where Honourable Momoh takes her in with Amina, she is also called to the high table as ‘Lady Jojolo’, to rub shoulders with the high and the mighty in the land. Bode Osanyin, by using these two significant symbols of affluence wants the reader to see Nigeria as a place where money is worshipped; it is immaterial how the money is made. This distorts the progress of the nation and degrades the status of womanhood and the populace.

Besides, “Hideout” is another symbol, which should be seen in the light of Enitan’s belief that “it was enough to

make me doubt we had any legitimate business in our country ..." (Atta, 2005:253). This is the hotel where she lived with Klaus Meyer for three months. It is their love-nest, a real hideout where she screens herself from her colleagues and the troubles of the outside world. But the illusion is temporary as she faces the reality in the country when Meyer dumps her. And that which is done in the darkness of Hideout blows open in the form of an unwanted pregnancy and into an illegitimate child. She toils for twenty years to bring her up with the hope of every sane parent that "... our children will make a better future by learning from our past mistakes ... we can show a future we imagined as well as a present and past we wish to improve" (Priebe, 2006:41).

Though 'Hideout' is a symbol of inspiration for some prostitutes like Auntie Rose who told Jojolo that the hotel is built by a retired prostitute; Jojolo gets disillusioned after the information. She yearns to build something like that until she learns the truth about its ownership; yet, it is still a symbol of inspiration for Auntie until her brutal murder. She strives hard and saves money in two reputable banks in town in order to retire as a respectable hotel owner, which never happened. Like all the other symbols, Hideout reflects a sick society that is addicted to materialism.

Furthermore, Oasis Supermarket represents the decadence and wastage of the leaders. It is a place where the rich and powerful, the termites and looters of the

national treasury compete for space to show how much they have stolen from the bankrupt and liquidated economy by their mindless embezzlement. Their wives and mistresses display the men's affluence by paying exorbitant prices on frivolities. And this happens in a country, where there is so much poverty and unemployment, where those who are employed are treated disgracefully, just like "... piece of Thing shrouded in white uniform" (2000:203).

Osanyin also makes use of irony in the novel to underscore his metaphor of the degradation of womanhood and the populace. As one reads the work, one notices that the title of the novel, *The Noble Mistress*, is an ironic one. One thinks that one is going to read an account of women like Cleopatra, Helen of Troy, Juliet in *Romeo and Juliet*, and such other noble mistresses. However, one's sense of propriety is assaulted by the novelist's graphic description of the sexual escapades of a teenage girl, which runs through a period of two decades and a half. But reading in between the lines, one notices that Jojolo is indeed a noble woman, for it is not what goes into one that kills one but what comes out of one: the unbridled avarice and insensitivity as displayed by the leaders. At least, Jojolo has an emotional side of her, which makes her sensitive to the suffering of people around her. Even when others are not sensitive of the "red hue in the sky" as they dance away when the curfew is lifted; she mentions that several times because she feels

that there are some Nigerians, who are being killed and maimed in other parts of the country.

She is also sensitive to Mobolaji da Costa's state, when the wife batters him. She attends to him like a mother. She is also eager to help when he is facing the wrath of the military for embezzlement of state funds. Indeed, the highest point of her nobility is seen in her ability to raise up one of the most brilliant and most beautiful girls in the country. Though a harlot, she does not abandon Tosheju like her mother abandoned her. She makes all sacrifices to ensure that she gets the best in life. Though a whore, she is not insulated to the fact that Tosheju eloped with a stranger unlike Alhaji Momoh who advises her to forget her elopement, after all, her own daughter left with an Indian Buddhist. The reader agrees *in toto* with Jojolo that the accusing finger ought to be pointing at the parasites, who drive her and her colleagues into prostitution. After all:

These days, everything has gone commercial, including our souls. We are all prostitutes ourselves, one way or the other. The real prostitutes and their hosts of clients are only the archetype. See how much derision is being heaped on these people when we are all guilty of about the same sin, in one form or another. Some 'harlots' are more innocent than some housewives. When a politician sells out his principles ..., when a policeman takes bribes;

when a wife milks dry her husband's bank account;
when a soldier's gun becomes his personal weapon
– these and many others are acts of prostitution
(2000:275).

There is also the irony in Jojolo's name, which in her vernacular language means 'angelic', "Pure, Innocent and Sweet (as a baby)" (2000:30). She uses her real name in her prostitution while the others give her the trade name of "Morning Star", which reflects her beauty, elegance, youthfulness and desirability. Osanyin uses this irony effectively to show that it is the adult society that pollutes the youths; their youthfulness, beauty and innocence varnish like the morning dew after going through harrowing experiences.

Shinkafa's brutal death is another ironic situation. This is a man who symbolizes the conscience of the nation, and the struggle for the liberation of the oppressed of the land. His wealth is not amassed through corrupt practices; it is through dint of hard-work. This is a man who defends the rights of the masses that he is called the "People's Senator" (2000:265). While the other politicians who emptied the treasury are merely detained and after sometime they must be released, he is murdered in cold blood. His murder shows that the military is not better than the civilians; they are more lethal than those they dethroned. It points out glaringly to the reader that another group of looters have taken the saddle of

leadership. However, his unborn child's survival after Jojolo's rape is a statement from the novelist: that either those who will liberate the country are not yet born or that they will be born into the cycle of doom that grips the country.

There is also the use of imagery in the work to bring out the novelist's message. There's the imagery that evokes age and decay in "... a fat log abandoned several years ago by the sawyer of Oko Biriki, rotting away slowly but steadily like anyone of us" (2000:35). This imagery of ageing, death and decadence runs throughout the work. Jojolo finds out that her father is ageing and his fortunes are also declining. Almost all the time in her narration, she makes references to the arduous nature of her prostitution. It shows that prostitution is a business that wears down the body and soul faster than any other profession.

Moreover, there is the imagery of the predator and the prey in her recollection:

Water crabs are always alert. They are the most alert little creatures I have ever seen. They appear to be on their toes. They never wondered too far from their watery homes... In spite of their sprightliness, water crabs fell prey to us (2000:113).

This gives the mental impression that most human beings are preys to others. In the novel, the prostitutes are

victims of their male customers – pimps and rapists – just as the populace is a host to the bloodsucking, parasitic leaders.

8.6 Conclusion

There is no doubt that Bode Osanyin, though a male novelist shows that indeed there is degradation of womanhood in Nigeria. He uses the events in the life of the major character and narrator, Jojolo, to prove that Nigerian women are marginalized, degraded and dehumanized; however, he parallels and situates it within the other forms of degradation and dehumanization of the populace, which exist in the entire country.

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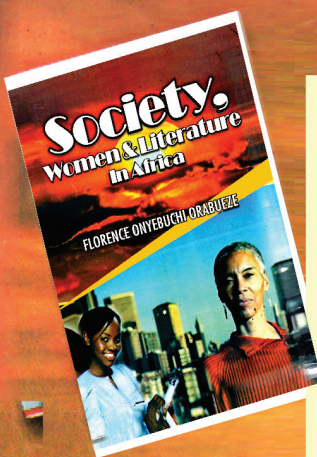
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This text is F.O. Orabueze's ebullient dance in the erudite plane of Literary Criticism. It is a bold volume which immediately inscribes her as an authentic voice among contemporary African critics. The author captures in a single panoramic sweep, the subtle concepts explored in feminist literature. Traversing the ideological, literary, political, cultural and ethical issues which are implicated in feminist writing, she shows how contemporary African writers have tried to counteract man's false assumptions about sex, love, society, fecundity and womanhood.

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